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EIGHT

SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR 1783,

AT THE LECTURE FOUNDED BY THE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

LATE CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY JOHN COBB, D. D.

FELLOW OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE.

——γνώσεθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς.

Jo. c. 8. v. 32.

OXFORD,

PRINTED AT THE CLARENDON PRESS, AND SOLD BY MESS. FLETCHER IN THE TURLE.

IMPRIMATUR,

SAM. DENNIS,

Vice-Can. OXON.

June 5. 1783.

TO THE REVEREND

THE HEADS OF COLLEGES,

THE FOLLOWING SERMONS,

PREACHED

AT THEIR APPOINTMENT,

ARE,

WITH GREAT RESPECT,

INSCRIBED.

Extract from the laſt Will and Teſtament of the late Reverend JOHN BAMPTON, *Canon of* Saliſbury.

—— "I give and bequeath my Lands "and Eſtates to the Chancellor, Maſters, "and Scholars of the Univerſity of Oxford "for ever, to have and to hold all and ſin- "gular the ſaid Lands or Eſtates upon truſt, "and to the intents and purpoſes herein after- "mentioned; that is to ſay, I will and ap- "point, that the Vice-Chancellor of the "Univerſity of Oxford for the time being "ſhall take and receive all the rents, iſſues, "and profits thereof, and (after all taxes, "reparations, and neceſſary deductions made) "that he pay all the remainder to the en- "dowment of eight Divinity Lecture Ser- "mons, to be eſtabliſhed for ever in the ſaid "Univerſity, and to be performed in the "manner following:

"I direct and appoint, that, upon the firſt "Tueſday in Eaſter Term, a Lecturer be "yearly choſen by the Heads of Colleges "only, and by no others, in the room ad- "joining to the Printing-Houſe, between "the

" the hours of ten in the morning and two
" in the afternoon, to preach eight Divinity
" Lecture Sermons, the year following, at
" St. Mary's in Oxford, between the com-
" mencement of the laſt month in Lent
" Term, and the end of the third week in
" Act Term.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that the eight
" Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be preach-
" ed upon either of the following ſubjects
" — to confirm and eſtabliſh the Chriſtian
" Faith, and to confute all heretics and ſchiſ-
" matics—upon the divine authority of the
" Holy Scriptures — upon the authority of
" the writings of the primitive Fathers, as
" to the faith and practice of the primitive
" Church — upon the Divinity of our Lord
" and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt—upon the Divi-
" nity of the Holy Ghoſt—upon the Articles
" of the Chriſtian Faith, as comprehended
" in the Apoſtles' and Nicene Creeds.

" Alſo I direct, that thirty copies of the
" eight Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be
" always printed, within two months after
" they are preached, and one copy ſhall be
" given to the Chancellor of the Univerſity,
" and one copy to the Head of every Col-
" lege, and one copy to the Mayor of the
" City

" City of Oxford, and one copy to be put " into the Bodleian Library; and the ex- " pence of printing them ſhall be paid out " of the revenue of the Lands or Eſtates " given for eſtabliſhing the Divinity Lecture " Sermons; and the Preacher ſhall not be " paid, nor be entitled to the revenue, before " they are printed.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that no perſon " ſhall be qualified to preach the Divinity " Lecture Sermons, unleſs he hath taken the " Degree of Maſter of Arts at leaſt, in one " of the two Univerſities of Oxford or Cam- " bridge; and that the ſame perſon ſhall " never preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons " twice."

" HOW may a man qualify himſelf,
" ſo as to be able to judge for him-
" ſelf, of the other religions profeſt in
" the world; to ſettle his own opinions
" in diſputable matters; and then to enjoy
" tranquillity of mind, neither diſturbing
" others, nor being diſturbed at what paſſes
" among them?"

Woolaſton's third Queſtion. See the Religion of Nature delineated.

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Tranquillity in life is not to be maintained without prudence; nor without the perſuaſion of the being and providence of GOD; nor without religion. Rational happineſs is not found in riches, honour, pleaſure, or in contemplation. It is only to be found in conſciouſneſs; yet not complete without the hope of immortality.

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SER-

SERMON V.

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doctrines were adapted to apoſtolic times. Difficulties ariſe alſo from the language of the ſacred writers, and from the nature of prophecy. But the greateſt obſtruction to chriſtian knowledge ariſeth from fooliſh and unlearned queſtions. Judicious knowledge is not found, but with modeſty; eſpecially in the preſent ſtate of confeſſion.

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SERMON I.

PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

MATT. VI. 21.

For where your Treaſure is, there will your Heart be alſo.

THE happineſs and tranquillity of human life, depend ſo manifeſtly upon the prudent conduct of it; that however the ancient philoſophers might differ, in forming the principle on which it ſhould be conducted, none of them ever maintained that it was ſafer or more judicious to turn their backs on all principle, and act at random. Even Epicurus has been ſlandered, wherever it has been ſaid of him, that he denied the obligations to moral virtue. For if he boaſted that he had broken the fetters of ſuperſtition and taken away the fear of GOD, when he repreſented the ſupreme Being as too happy to concern himſelf with what is paſſing here;

if he recommended to man, as his great object, to purſue continual pleaſure, or a ſtate of tranquillity: ſtill he left the moral virtues in ſufficient force, if not to ſecure the favour of GOD, and the divine protection and rewards; yet to promote the peace and welfare of a man's ſelf, conſidered both as an individual, and a member of ſociety. For he well knew [a], that the mind is not to be poſſeſſed in ſerenity, unleſs a ſtrict ſelf-government be maintained: that for want of it the natural appetites become turbulent, and raiſe the moſt violent commotions there: that as a city in an inſurrection, and a private family in domeſtic ſtrife; ſo the mind, agitated by paſſions that are under no control, cannot poſſibly enjoy any reſt or quiet. And moreover, that ſince man, in ſociety is intimately connected with man, and their intereſts bound up together; the ſocial obligations cannot be diſpenſed with, as they are ſo much adapted to conciliate kindneſs and favour, to produce an intercourſe of good and friendly offices, and to prevent one man from vexing and interfering with another. It is therefore the maxim of Epicurus [b] that no wiſe (or prudent) man

[a] Cic. de Fin. L. I. §. 18. p. 59. [b] Cic. de Fin.

can

can fail of obtaining happineſs, which eludes the purſuit of all mankind beſides. Such were the ſentiments of that philoſopher, whoſe whole ſtudy it was to exalt the enjoyments of life; to preſerve it, unincumbered even with the obligations of religion: and who allowed (not without reluctance) only thoſe reſtraints to voluptuous indulgence, which experience taught him to be neceſſary to ſecure, to prolong the gratification. There is not therefore the authority of Epicurus, and if not of him, of no ſchool of philoſophy certainly, to be pleaded in excuſe for thoſe, who lead their lives without prudence [c], without propoſing to themſelves ſome rational end to purſue, and taking pains to fall into the track that leads to it. Wherefore, as far as the argument taken from the common ſenſe, reaſon, and experience of all mankind is concluſive (which in queſtions of expediency ought to have the firſt weight) ſo far is it injudicious, to tread the paths of life at random, to forſake the guidance of prudence; and as [d] herds of cattle, to wander without diſcretion, not where a ſpot of more tempting herbage invites them, but where fancy im-

[c] Seneca de Vitâ beatâ. [d] Vitâ beatâ.

pels them, that is to be reduced to no rational principle whatever.

But what is that philoſophy, which excludes the ſupreme Being, from the care and direction of the univerſe? [e] It breaks the bonds, 'tis true, of piety, ſanctity and religion; and renders worſhip, devotion, and prayer, needleſs and unavailing ſervices. But then it roots up at the ſame time all the enjoyment of life: deſtroying the ſatisfaction of a proſperous ſtate, by rendering the poſſeſſion inſecure, and depriving the miſerable, of his only refuge and conſolation. For a being, inconſiderable, as an individual man, in the univerſe, deſirous above all things, by the law of his nature, to preſerve his exiſtence; yet obnoxious, in an extreme, to injury and deſtruction from every quarter, is a moſt forlorn and abject creature, without the protection of a governor of the world. On this ſuppoſition, the ſtate of man is even worſe than that of every other ſpecies in the animal world. They are all ſubject alike to the law of ſelf preſervation, the firſt law, the moſt ruling paſſion of their nature: and they are all individually weak, and inſufficient for that purpoſe. But the

[e] Cic. de Nat. Deor.

irrational

irrational ſpecies ſeem neither to be tortured with the recollection of paſt evils, nor the apprehenſion of thoſe to come: while man's boaſted reaſon, and the faculty of prudence which diſtinguiſhes him, enable him to look forward to the conſequences of things. By this foreſight he perceives the approach of danger, and views the progreſs of calamities ſtill remote; thus anticipating evils, that are brought on him by natural or moral cauſes, which neither his ſkill can elude, or his power control. Though the ſupreme Being has ſo amply furniſhed every habitable part of the globe with the neceſſary accommodations for human life; yet is every clime, every ſeaſon, and every ſtation obnoxious to its peculiar calamities. In ſome countries earthquakes, in others tempeſts, in others famine and peſtilence deſolate populous regions, and ſweep off the miſerable inhabitants: in all, unfruitful ſeaſons, and accidental calamities, at one time, blaſt the fortunes of individuals; at another, ſpread a general misfortune. When the peaſant, at the foot of Veſuvius, beholds the burning torrent deſcending, or the havock made in the fertile lands of another huſbandman: why does he ſecurely cultivate his own fields, which the next eruption may render de-

ſolate; why not rather flee from this land of terror, and deſert his precarious habitation? The confidence that is neceſſary to encourage him to perſiſt in his courſe of induſtry; and to induce every man, in this ſtate of uncertain tenure, not to deſert every office in life that looks beyond the preſent moment, can only rationally be derived from the perſuaſion, that the preſervation of man, a creature formed not ſufficient to himſelf, is, and muſt be, an object, by no means foreign from the attention of the author of his nature.

Or, if the evils that fall on man, from natural cauſes be not enough; let thoſe that ſpring from the diſorderly paſſions of mankind be taken alſo into the account. From man's ungoverned appetites, his luſt of power, of wealth, of gratification, wars ariſe; and tumults, rapine, murder, treaſon, violence depopulate regions endowed with the richeſt gifts of nature. And even abſtracting public calamities, and the themes of the tragic muſe [f]; thoſe perplexities, which have furniſhed ſubjects for comic entertainment, are not leſs baneful to the comfort of life: domeſtic jars, the ill offices of neighbours,

[f] Harris on Happineſs.

mortifi-

mortifications, jealouſies, ſuſpicions, which are produced, in conſequence of the ſame diſorders, in private life. In ſhort, the whole world is full of uncertainty, and proſperous and untoward events are dealt promiſcuouſly for ever. Life, begun with the moſt flattering omens, frequently cloſes in calamity, and the faireſt proſpects are quickly ſhut in, by a dark and gloomy ſucceſſion of diſaſters. Under this impreſſion of the precarious tenure on which the whole of man's portion here is poſſeſſed, the moſt diſconſolate reflections muſt ariſe in every conſiderate mind, the moſt diſpiriting preſages, the moſt enervating terrors, but for reliance on the protection of that ſupreme Being, who alone can be an effectual ſupport to man through the paths of life, a ſure guardian in dangers, and refuge in diſtreſſes. For it is an overruling providence alone, which can preſerve the frail bark that ſails in a tempeſtuous ocean; even that providence which can allay the ſtorm, or command the waves that threaten to daſh it in peices, to waft it ſafely to its port.

But if the rational ſecurity of life can only be derived from the perſuaſion of divine providence and from truſt in GOD; the conſolation will belong to thoſe, and thoſe only, who

who ſtudy to ſerve and pleaſe him and to do his will. The reſt of mankind, from this principle, may find reaſon for compunction, for terror and apprehenſion; but peace of mind can only follow a conformity to religion. For if the diſtinction between good and evil be really in the will of GOD: if [g] that unſeen arbiter of human deſtiny delight in virtue: if vice be abhorrent from his eſſential attributes; he cannot expreſs his ſentiments towards each reſpectively, without making a diſcrimination between thoſe who act agreeably to his will, and thoſe who do the contrary. Rational tranquillity is only therefore to be found in an habitual attention and conformity to religion; nor will any outward circumſtances compenſate for a defect in this reſpect, or furniſh permanent enjoyment without it. For though a man could command whatever is vulgarly eſteemed, though riches, honour, pleaſure ſhould crown his labours; ſtill he [h] muſt ſeek in religion, after all, for that ſatisfaction of mind, without which, theſe are of no eſtimation.

When the author of nature ennobled man, above every other ſpecies in the animal

[g] Ariſtot. Eth. ad Nicom. [h] Sophoc. Antigo.

world,

world, with the valuable endowments of the mind; he gave him a duty and an intereſt above them, to reſult from the cultivation and improvement and the due exerciſe of his rational powers: and moreover a ſuperior inſtinct, that mere animal and ſenſual gratifications ſhould not ſatisfy his natural deſires. To every creature he has imparted appetites to impel them to act as the purpoſes of their creation, and their exigencies may require: but to man, together with ſenſes and paſſions, an intellect beſides; that he alone of all the animal ſpecies, ſhould form a moral character. By this endowment man is conſtituted the artificer of his own happineſs; made to purſue the natural objects of deſire, not as the brute ſpecies, having reſpect only to preſent and animal gratifications; but conſtructing in his comprehenſive judgment, a plan for the conduct of the whole of his exiſtence, and for ſecuring the welfare not of that portion alone which is viſible; but, by a natural preſentiment, of an exiſtence extending far beyond this preſent ſcene, to indefinite if not eternal duration. To this comprehenſive judgment it muſt be attributed (for if not to this, it muſt be to a divine impreſſion) that not only natural good (whatever immediately conduces

duces to the welfare of the animal nature) becomes an object of desire, but also moral good: in short, it is owing to this distinguishing faculty, that what becomes a man, is placed high in his estimation not less than what is obviously advantageous to him. It is thus, by the application of his prudence, and his discretion, that man is to complete his character, the outlines of which, as a painter's disciple, he has received from nature; [i] for ever looking to the copy that this his true wisdom as a master has given him to imitate. It is thus he guides his conduct by general principles, abstracted it may be from present motives, and the sensible objects of selfish or immediate interest: principles moreover that have regard to the whole period of his existence, and respect every relation in which he stands, and by which he may be affected. But what is [k] first in nature, is not first to man. For in nature the order of existences descends from Genera, through Species to Particulars: but man receiving his first conceptions through the medium of his senses, is long acquainted with particulars, before he abstracts himself

[i] Harris on Hap. Cic. de Fin. L. IV. §. XIII. p. 304. hanc intuens.

[k] Harris's Hermes. Aristotl. Phys.

so

ſo far as to aſcend to generals, or take a comprehenſive view of the ſyſtem in which he has a ſtation. Hence it is, [l] that, though it be the firſt principle in human prudence to preſerve itſelf in its beſt ſtate: yet in the infancy of the mind this principle is confuſed, whilſt it is not aſcertained, either what that preſervation implies, or what is the extent of the powers which are to be preſerved, or what the nature be, that is the ſubject from which the character is to be formed. It is by degrees the mind expands itſelf, to comprehend how outward things affect it, and in what rank of importance, they ſtand to it. From hence may be ſeen the reaſon why riches, dignities, pleaſure and contemplation captivate ſo large a portion of mankind, while theſe objects hold forth to view an obvious, palpable, and immediate gratification. Inſnared by the meretricious arts of theſe allurements, a great part of our ſpecies place their treaſure [m] and their hearts in theſe purſuits, and ſtop ſhort of the conſultation of true ethic prudence, ſatisfied with the gratifications, of which wealth, power, pleaſure or contemplation promiſe to put them into immediate poſ-

[l] Cic. de Fin. L. V. §. IX. p. 369. [m] Matt. c. 6. v. 21.

ſeſſion.

ſeſſion. But of all theſe, when eſtimated truly, there is not one that deſerves to be purſued for its own ſake; not one, that can ſecure a ſtate of enjoyment ſuitable to the excellent faculties of man: though they all confeſſedly have ſomething deſirable, that they can lend in aid to this purpoſe. Theſe, it is true, are groſs and vulgar deceptions; yet groſs and vulgar as they are, they not only prevail with a great part of our ſpecies; but alſo, where a more refined ſentiment is pretended, even amongſt philoſophers, and where a primary influence is, in words, denied them: when they are admitted as ſecondary objects, they too often encroach upon the more reaſonable and primary, drawing away the largeſt ſhare of the affections to themſelves. [n] Thus it is, that in a life of buſineſs, gain or glory are avowedly, or in fact the ſtimulating paſſion, for the moſt part; or where leiſure is cultivated, it is, in order that men may be vacant to the purpoſes of pleaſure, or of ſpeculation.

With reſpect to the lucrative life and to wealth its object: this is not the certain reward of induſtry; neither infallibly to be acquired, nor poſſeſſed with ſecurity: and

[n] Harris.

as

as to the satisfaction that riches can confer in themselves, "[o] There is no good in them "to their owners, (as Solomon observes) "saving the beholding of them with their "eyes." The same observations are equally applicable to the political life, and to power its object: power is not to be obtained with certainty, nor securely to be enjoyed, as the historic page abundantly exemplifies. And the satisfaction produced immediately by dignities, is to be sought in splendor, attendance, the gaze and envy of beholders; from all which, there is no substantial good to be derived, to satisfy the natural wants or wishes of mankind. "[p] In the pursuit both of "wealth and power, want of opportunity, "or superior skill, and the craft and kna- "very of competitors, perpetually disap- "point and dupe those who wish to attain "an eminent share of them; and who even "have no objection to barter honour and pub- "lic interest for them. It is not so in the paths "of virtue and religion: here, there is room "enough for all, and men may pursue their "good things without any inconvenience to "each other. But the vicious world is not "wide enough for those who would be emi-

[o] Eccles. c. 5. v. 11.

[p] Jortin, V. III. Serm. 9.

"nent

" nent in it: for the cravings of every one " are inſatiable," and there is no boundary to ſelfiſh wiſhes. Thus the worldly are ever puſhing forward, like travellers over the mountains, while they fancy that the next point in view will terminate the labour of aſcending: but when they ſeem to have reached the ſummit, they find other eminences ſtill riſing in ſucceſſion, to be ſurmounted with equal difficulty, and to reward their toil with equal diſſatisfaction. But turn in the next place to the pleaſurable and let wealth and power be purſued, not for their own ſakes, but for the conveniences and the ſecure enjoyment they ſeem to command. And let it be ſuppoſed alſo (in oppoſition to conſtant experience) that the worldly mind, when it has obtained a competency, [q] ſhall addreſs itſelf to enjoy in eaſe, leiſure and relaxation the only reward it ſeeks. Still how vain the purſuit? " [r] If, " in the acquiſition of riches and honour, " health be forfeited or the eſteem of man- " kind; or if the acquiſition be not com- " pleted till old age bring infirmities, de- " crepitude, loſs and decay of ſenſes with " it:" in either caſe, eaſe and relaxation

[q] Luke c. 12. v. 19. [r] Jortin.

become

become the unſubſtantial phantoms of imagination; and leiſure brings no enjoyment; but diſguſt, ſpleen and diſcontent attend upon it, more fatiguing to the body and the mind, than the hardeſt labour and moſt abject drudgery. But let the gay voluptuary enter life in the moſt enviable circumſtances; with an ample patrimony, ſufficient to furniſh in great abundance a feſtive and luxurious board; and with a reſolution to gratify every appetite, and forego no delight that this world affords. What will the ſum total of his happineſs amount to, either in the purſuit or reſult? In the perception, the pleaſures of ſenſe produce an exquiſite gratification, like ſome pungent odors: but the gratification is tranſient and momentary, ſucceeded by laſſitude and diſguſt. During his purſuit the voluptuary[s] is not to be ſeen in the public walks, where patriot virtue, induſtry, credit, fortitude juſtice, manhood delight to appear; but in the ſtews, enervated by effeminate indulgence, ſurrounded with harlots, paraſites, and the apparatus of gluttony, luxury and intemperance; ſtretched on the ſoft beds of indolence, covered with perfumes, and ineffectually lulled to ſlum-

[s] Cic. de Fin. L. II.

bers

bers by the voice of muſick. If this be the rational happineſs of man, who, but fools, are to take care of the public welfare? But view the train that follows: ſickneſs, racking pains, diſorders in numberleſs frightful ſhapes ſucceed; premature old age, ſwift decay of ſenſe and faculties, inſatiable appetite, attended by ſpleen and loathing of every fulſome pleaſure.

The ſpeculative life remains, in which refinement of taſte, and an exquiſite knowlege, ſeem to promiſe a more rational ſatisfaction. But what are the pleaſures of ſpeculation? What are they in cultivation? What in conſummation? In contemplation terminating in theory, men ſeek the pleaſures of tracing every branch of ſcience, of purſuing truth beyond obvious and vulgar comprehenſion to her remote receſſes, of abſtracting, of compounding ideas, and framing ſyſtems and conceptions far exceeding whatever the herd of mankind can imagine. From hence there may very poſſibly reſult to the viſionary ſpeculatiſt an exquiſite complacency, attended with an elation of mind, which reflections, or an imagined intellectual ſuperiority over the reſt of mankind, may produce. And to the man of contemplation moreover, in his cloſet, this may appear a full

full recompenſe for all his labours. But change the ſcene, and how fantaſtic will this unſubſtantial viſion then appear? The world is not calculated to gratify the ſpeculatiſt. The hours of contemplation are quickly ſucceeded by calls into common life. The natural wants, the neceſſary cares of man's ſtation here, break the ſhort ſlumbers of viſionary enjoyment, and oblige the recluſe votary of contemplative pleaſure, to come out reluctantly, into the world. There he meets with the common accidents of life, but he meets them with a reſolution debilitated by diſuſe, with nerves unſtrung by inactivity of body, and with a mind too eaſily ruffled by oppoſition, from a vain conceit of its own excellence and ſuperiority.

Not one of theſe worldly objects therefore, theſe idols, which hold ſo large a portion of mankind enſlaved, is worthy to engroſs our hearts. "Happy is it for us "that the unworthineſs is ſo apparent, [t] for "how ſhould we dote upon the world, were "its imperfections leſs conſpicuous, when "we love it ſtill falſe and ungrateful as it "is?" Though the hazard is ſo apparent,

[t] O Munde, teneri vis pergens: quid faceres ſi remaneres? Quàm non deciperes dulcis: ſi amarus Alimenta mentiris? Auguſtinus.

we can hardly turn our ear from the Siren's ſong, or refuſe the cup of the inchantreſs [u], though we know, that however it may intoxicate, it cannot ſatisfy our natural deſires. Strange effect of infatuation! And yet in all this ſurvey, the courſe of events has been ſuppoſed to follow the wiſhes and expectations of men in an even train; and life not to be ruffled by any untoward accident, or any intervening evil.

But that man has a very poor chance for happineſs in life, whoſe plan is only calculated to give him pleaſure in the fair and proſperous ſeaſons of it. No object of purſuit deſerves to be placed in the firſt rate of eſtimation, that will not anſwer a deſcription, ſimilar to that given to the liberal arts, by Cicero. [w] "A principle that may "be adapted to all ſeaſons, to every period "and every ſtation: a principle that will "nouriſh and bring up youth, and give plea-"ſure in old age: that will add dignity and "ornament to proſperous circumſtances, and "afford refuge and conſolation in adverſity: "that will furniſh delight to private life, "and prove no interruption in a public "ſtation: that will ſhed a grateful influence

[u] Circe. [w] Pro Arch. Poetâ.

on

" on our couch, our journeyings, our retire-
" ment." But the objects of worldly desire will in none of these respects answer the expectation of their votary. On the contrary, in youth they corrupt and debauch the mind, and poison it in old age with spleen and vexation; adding besides, to the weight of its natural infirmities, a pungent sorrow, that life must be quitted so soon. So far from giving dignity to success, they fill the mind with narrow passions, producing self-conceit, pride and insolence, with various other unbecoming dispositions; in adversity they leave their votary to struggle unsupported, with the complicated mortifications of disappointment and distress without resource. To private life they annex splendour indeed, and luxury, with those multiplied appetites of refined taste that fill her sickly train; to public life, pomp with vulgar admiration: but to neither, satisfaction or contentment. They banish sleep, fill the road with apprehension, the retirement with terrour. Where then is the principle to be found worthy to be entrusted with the conduct of human life? How shall man form his ruling passion? Where fix his hopes, his wishes and desires? Or where can he find a happiness adapted to his na-

ture? A happineſs, it muſt be, fixed and permanent, unlike the fleeting gratifications of ſenſe: a happineſs built on ſolid * and immoveable foundations, unlike the deluſive hopes, the inſecure poſſeſſions, with which thoſe prevalent idols of the world beguile ſo many of our ſpecies.

In all mechanical arts, and in all exertions of genius and taſte, the object is to produce ſome work, perfect and complete in its kind, to remain when finiſhed, ſubſervient to the convenience of the artiſt; or, a ſpecimen of his own ſkill and a model for future artiſts. But is the ſame remark true of the exertions of prudence? Is there a definite period or ſummit of improvement, with which, when attained, the mind may ſit down ſatisfied, in the enjoyment or contemplation of the exquiſite character it has exhibited? Surely the art of forming human life is not ſuch. For (conſidering it without any reſpect ſave to what paſſes here) every period of it requires a peculiar cultivation; and the conduct of life is a taſk never finiſhed, till the cloſe of it removes man from this, at leaſt, if not to another ſphere. The happineſs of this life therefore, and preſent

* Matt. c. 6.

reward

reward of moral virtue (if ſuch there be) as they are not evidently to be found in the finiſhed work, muſt lie in the continual improvement, and thoſe exertions by which the character is daily rendered more accompliſhed. And as the puniſhment of guilt lies [y] not in pain of body, or misfortune, both of which may happen to a good man [z]; but in the conſciouſneſs of crimes, with its train of depreſſion of mind, and confuſed, infatuated, diſtempered underſtanding: ſo, on the contrary, the reward of prudence, lies in approbation of conſcience, the upright mind, the ſerene judgment that attend it. When the Decii devoted themſelves for their country, and when Mutius [a] exhibited that remarkable inſtance of Roman fortitude before Porſenna: it was the conſciouſneſs of the value of the action, that ſupported thoſe patriots in the article of death; this laſt in the agony he ſuſtained. [b] Even Epicurus found in conſciouſneſs, reſource againſt violent pain in the cloſe of his life; and though he could not entertain any hopes of immortality, conſiſtently with the doctrines he had taught; yet in his letters, he pro-

[y] Cic. in Piſo. §. 20. vid. Not. [z] Juvenal, Sat. I. L. V. [a] Scævola. [b] Harris. Cic. de Fin. L. II. §. 30. p. 173.

feſſed himſelf ſupported under his ſufferings, by the recollection of the ſyſtem he had framed. But what ſhall we ſay of Mr Hume? Did a ſimilar conſciouſneſs ſupport this imitator of Epicurus, this modern foe to ſuperſtition? He certainly poſſeſſed it, if he was not without conſolation in his laſt moments. But it could not be. No habit, no prejudice will account for ſuch a monſtrous ſuppoſition. For what intolerable conceit, what arrogance not to be endured, muſt there have been in the man, who could derive ſuch inward ſupport from the reflection that he had treated contemptuouſly a doctrine held ſacred, as a revelation of GOD's will, by the moſt conſiderate, the moſt virtuous, the beſt eſteemed of mankind? The happineſs of life then (if ſuch there be) is placed in conſciouſneſs, conſciouſneſs of conducting it by the beſt principles, of performing every office, of practiſing virtue, of adhering to religion. And here a happineſs ariſes ſuited to all times, every ſtation and every age: this alſo is capable of furniſhing delight equally to youth and to old age: it will give luſtre to a proſperous ſtation, dignity in adverſity: it is applicable equally to domeſtic and public life: and will give balm to ſleep, chearfulneſs in travel and retirement.

tirement. This is a reward alſo annexed invariably to moral virtue, and to that alone, a prize not in the power of fortune to beſtow indiſcriminately.

But it is impoſſible nevertheleſs to reſt here. The buſineſs of human life is not conducted without labour. To bring the irregular appetites into ſubjection, to conſtruct a reaſonable plan for the conduct of life, to purſue it through every period, through good and bad fortune, through all ſtations, through perplexities, diſtreſſes, obſtructions almoſt irreſiſtable: are not performed without painful application, and unwearied aſſiduity. The huſbandman, the mechanic, the artiſt, have it each in view, that when they have finiſhed the buſineſs of the day, the hours of diligence ſhall be ſucceeded by relaxation; and their care beſtowed, crowned with an equal recompenſe. But man, (if in this life only he has hope) has the labour without the reſt: the mortification, when he has with infinite pains, formed his character to virtuous habits, and ſubdued in a great meaſure the difficulties of his moral taſk: and when now at length, he hopes to find the fair [c] guerdon of his

[c] Milton's Lycidas.

labours,

labours, and enjoy a tranquil remainder of life in the praiſe and practice of virtue, the fates ruſh in, and ſnatch the delicious, well earned morſel from him. Epicurus ſpake therefore but the language of nature, when he placed the recompenſe of wiſdom, of prudence, of virtue, in tranquil peaceful enjoyment.

But all nature ſpeaks one language, that life is not the ſeaſon of this enjoyment, and natural deſire points out a future ſtate to man, when the ſupreme remunerator ſhall, in his allotment of his moral creatures, make a juſt and equal diſcrimination between them, according to their moral qualifications. For there is in our natural propenſities, an inſeparable love of exiſtence, and an abhorrence from the thought of parting with it. Paſſions that affect [d] every individual of our ſpecies in every ſtage of life, when fourſcore years have paſſed, not leſs, than before he has ſeen twenty revolutions. The reward of conſciouſneſs is not therefore man's ultimate object. It is an earneſt of the favour of his maker, a foretaſte of future recompenſe. It is a preſent encouragement to do his duty, that though evils attend the practice of

[d] Cic. de Fin. L. V. §. 11.

virtue,

virtue, "[e] the good man is satisfied from "himself." Than this satisfaction no greater inducement to perseverance can be found, no greater consolation under the pressure of real evils. Such are the intimations, by which the will of our great master is naturally discerned: and thus are we induced, by the comfort, the admonition, the exhortation of this his voice within us, to perform every office; till it shall please him to translate us from this place to that unknown country, where his providence will still follow us, to recompense every man according to his works.

It is this last persuasion that removes the gloom and every thing disconsolate from the prospect of impending dissolution: this too, renders the passive virtues of obedience, a practicable, a reasonable, nay a chearful service. It was this that made Socrates[f] acquiesce, unmoved, in the divine will, when he was called forward to set an example of suffering; and this induced him to think no period of life premature, that was ordained by the supreme disposer of all things.

The whole result of our inquiries, therefore, is: that it is from religion alone

[e] Prov. c. 14. v. 14. [f] Plato. Apol.

man

man can obtain ſatisfaction in life, and derive peace and tranquillity of mind; and from thence alone at the cloſe of it, can quit this ſcene in poſſeſſion of real repoſe and effectual conſolation.

SER-

SERMON II.

I. Cor. I. 19.

It is written: I will deſtroy the Wiſdom of the wiſe, and will bring to nothing the Underſtanding of the prudent.

THE friendſhip of the world, though attended, without doubt, with many conveniences, deſerves not to be purſued as the moſt material intereſt of a human creature. A good anſwerable to the univerſal preconceptions of mankind in a far higher degree, is to be found in the conſciouſneſs of virtue. But it is not even with this that the mind can reſt ſatisfied as its ultimate object: ſince the natural deſires of man carry him out of this period, to be ſolicitous for his well-being in a future ſtate, a period of no limited duration. To point

point out by what conduct this present and future welfare may be obtained, is the province of religion. But since there are various systems which profess to teach men the art of conducting life, the following seems to be a question of the first importance. "How "a man may qualify himself, so as to be "able to judge, for himself, of the religions "professed in the world; to settle his own "opinions in disputable matters; and then "to enjoy tranquillity of mind, neither dis-"turbing others, nor being disturbed at "what passes among them."

Such is, with very little variation, the third question proposed in Mr Woolaston's delineation of the religion of nature. A question which he never answered, and though the editor of his delineation informs the world[a] that Mr Woolaston had made some progress in collecting materials for this purpose, when an accident hastened his death: I profess myself convinced that the question never could have been answered, to the satisfaction of him, or any other rational enquirer, upon his principles.

In the investigation of this point it is necessary that we act as skeptics, and suffer

[a] Preface.

not

not ourſelves to be led away by names and popular prejudices. But on the other ſide, liberal conſtruction becomes us on this occaſion, as men whoſe objects are realities, and not merely words and names. And let us avoid alſo the injudicious conduct of thoſe who think that they cannot expreſs due acknowledgments, for the divine manifeſtations: unleſs they "detract [b] from the "native brightneſs of the lamp of reaſon; "which was alſo given by GOD, to en-"lighten every man that cometh into the "world."

Rational religion, as exhibited by ſyſtematical writers, conveys the idea of an abſtruſe ſcience of ſpeculation, rather than of the art of conducting life with prudence. It is termed philoſophy by learned writers, and St Paul [c] denominates it wiſdom, and the wiſdom of the world. But ſuch an idea does not by any means come up to the notion of a ſyſtem of rational religion; which, as calculated to ſerve to purpoſes of general uſe, and univerſal moral information, ſhould rather be plain, ſimple, obvious and convincing, and employed to commu-

[b] Squire, of the truth &c. of nat. and rev. religion, 12°. Sect. 30. p. 60.

[c] 1 Cor. c. 2.

nicate

nicate enlarged, correct, and lively notions and impreſſions of the principles of common ſenſe, of which the clown and the philoſopher alike are partakers. For if rational religion be placed in an abſtruſe ſcience, to be comprehended only by men of deep reſearch; as the object of religion is to lead its profeſſors, through the practice of duty, to the higheſt ſtate of enjoyment, of which their nature is capable; and as no claſs of men, limit their wiſhes to mere exiſtence, but all aſpire after well-being: the lot of the lower claſſes, which include the majority, would be hard indeed, to be debarred of the advantages of religion, by their ſtation in the uſeful and laborious ſcenes of life. Yet no vulgar capacity is ſufficient, no ſmall ſhare of education and leiſure is requiſite for the comprehenſion of any philoſophical ſyſtem. In every ſuch ſyſtem the firſt point attempted to be ſettled, was the leading object of rational deſire, the ruling principle of conduct. And it juſtly holds this place. For as religion is ſought, to ſhow the diſtinction [d] of actions, into good, evil, and indifferent; the judgment on which this diſtinction is founded, muſt be formed in the

[d] Woolaſton.

reaſon

reaſon of thoſe whoſe actions are to follow this judgment: otherwiſe, if they cannot aſſign a reaſon for their conduct, their religion cannot be rational. In adjuſting the leading object of deſire, a large field of ſpeculation opened on the mind. The different rank of importance in which thoſe univerſal preconceptions [e], thoſe common ſentiments of good, and implanted deſires ſhould ſtand, was a judgment to be formed, upon information. Of the appetites natural to the human ſpecies, ſome are animal, ſome rational: to make a juſt diſcrimination [f] between theſe, and give a due degree of countenance to each, were objects of diſcretion. In like manner, of moral good, where one office ſeemed to ſtand in the way of, and oppoſe another (and the acuteneſs of moral enquirers has furniſhed numberleſs queſtions of this kind) which was to be preferred? To ſettle theſe queſtions, the nature, the ſtate of man in the ſcale of beings, his relations, his dependencies on ſuperior and inferior orders, and alſo on other beings of his own ſpecies were points to be clearly inveſtigated.

[e] Προλήψεις
κοιναι
εμφυτοι } εννοιαι.
φυσικαι

[f] Cic. de Off. L. I. §. 4.

Here

Here the immenſe field of ſpeculation opened. Firſt, of the author of human being, what is the divine nature, what his will, his diſpenſations what, and his deſigns with reſpect to man? Then of man in himſelf, and aſſociated with his fellow creatures: his ſtation with reſpect to himſelf, and his circumſtances with reſpect to them, make his obligations vary indefinitely. Such are the vaſt regions of truth to be explored in fixing a rational ſovereign good. It may be thought uncandid perhaps, as arguing from an abuſe, to obſerve; that in every branch of this inquiry, the temptations to deviate into inveſtigations of mere theory, are not to be reſiſted by men, devoted to philoſophizing by long ſettled habits. However this be, upon this extenſive plan[s], this wide field of ſpeculation, each ſyſtem of philoſophy is founded: and may truly be called an eſſay to aſcertain the religion of man. But theſe ſyſtems are far too cumberſome for general uſe. The calls of buſineſs would not allow to every man leiſure, the capacities of men would not qualify all, to go through thoſe deductions of reaſon, from whence the principles of ſuch a ſyſtem were drawn. To theſe

[s] A mighty Maze, but not without a Plan.
Pope's Eſſay on Man, Line 6.

men

men therefore, they could not be the principles of rational conduct, becauſe the reaſon of them was not level with their conceptions; but to be diſcovered only, by an inveſtigation to which they were unequal: and becauſe it is as impoſſible to underſtand with the reaſon of another man, as to ſee with his eyes. Thus, while philoſophy was calculated (as the proficients aſſerted) only for the wiſe man in each ſchool reſpectively, the laborious and induſtrious were excluded from participation in this exquiſite art of forming human life. But the philoſophers, thus raiſed to ſo enviable a preeminence, have amply revenged the public quarrel on themſelves. For, in truth, great abſtraction cannot have place in the conduct of common life; and could never enter, or long continue even with the theoriſt, when he applied himſelf to the management of his ſecular affairs. Hence it was, that in their intercourſe with mankind the philoſophers themſelves were governed by the common rules of prudence, as other men; which (far different from abſtract theory) whether engaged in conducting political or private concerns, was directed by the maxims of experience, and influenced by contingent circumſtances, and occaſional expediency.

From the ſo different principles that governed men of ſpeculation in public life, and the cloſet, it is amply accounted for. "That "practice[h] too often creeps where theory "can ſoar, and the philoſopher proves as "weak as thoſe whom he contemns." The philoſophers indeed, in this reſpect, acted in the ſame manner preciſely, as the cultivators of every other ſcience. Each follows the train of thought, and uſes the inſtruments (if there be any) adapted to his own philoſophical purpoſe: but in the tranſaction of public or domeſtic buſineſs, conforms to the obvious rules of prudence, and to the common maxims of expediency. A ſcience of ſpeculation, ſuch an intellectual ſyſtem, ſo limited to men of great abſtraction, and philoſophic leiſure, is not worthy of the appellation of natural or rational religion. Let it retain the title of philoſophy, or aſſume the name of wiſdom, the wiſdom of the world: but let nothing paſs for rational religion, that will admit of any other limitations, than thoſe which mark the definition of the ſpecies. For this religion (as the name imports) in its obligations and its ſanctions applies to every partaker of the faculty

[h] Harris.

of

of reaſon; and therefore ought to render the principles, the foundation, the means, the advantages and end of religion, level to the underſtanding and capacity of the inquirer of every claſs and denomination. Were it not ſo, this abſurdity would follow: the religious qualifications of men would not be moral, but natural and intellectual; and every man's rank, in this reſpect, would bear proportion to his natural abilities, to his education, and ſuch extraneous cauſes, totally adventitious to him.

Another objection to rational religion, as exhibited by philoſophy, ariſes from the uncertainty of it. The principles; nay even the ſovereign principle and criterion of duty, are differently conſtructed by various philoſophers; nor do any two agree exactly even in the moſt fundamental particular. The regions of truth are infinite, extending far beyond this viſible ſyſtem of the univerſe, as far as that eternal mind which made, directs, and governs the whole. Of truth, the object of human knowlege, the regions are indefinite; for wherever one thing can be affirmed of another, there is truth. In this wide field, the philoſophic mind expatiating, unable from the unbounded extent, to compriſe the whole, as a ſingle object, in

one perception, fixes its attention, now upon one point of view, now on another: and particular truths, as different points in view, ſtrike men differently, as their various taſte and judgment, their fancy alſo and accidental inducements ſeverally incline them. Hence truths are placed in a different rank of importance and diſtinction by men reſpectively, and their opinions, their principles, their characters vary, as their features. Thus, while each philoſopher, with a freedom of inveſtigation and inquiry, has judged for himſelf; and, governed by private reaſon, has placed the ſame truths in different lights, and different eſtimation; the ſyſtems they have framed have varied materially, ſo materially indeed, as to affect the whole form and foundation of religion, by conſtructing the ruling principle, and the ſtandard of truth and virtue in a manner totally diſſimilar. It was thus, that Epicurus on the one hand, taught his followers to purſue pleaſure, and to cultivate the moral virtues in proportion to the degree in which they contributed to increaſe and prolong voluptuous gratification: while Zeno, on the contrary, placing the ſovereign good in truth and virtue, taught his Stoic to reject and deſpiſe pleaſure, as obnoxious to his purpoſe.

Such

Such oppoſition in the principles of a ſcience, and that not in principles which are immaterial, but in thoſe which hold the firſt rank and are fundamental, muſt of neceſſity create great confuſion amongſt the cultivators of it, and perplex in the higheſt degree the candid and impartial inquirer. For were a man, not prepoſſeſſed in favour of any ſect, to apply to philoſophy for moral and prudential informations: ſuch a one would not willingly pay implicit deference to any ſyſtem; but would ſearch for truth, whereever he could find it through them all. This man, as he read one well connected ſyſtem, would find truths arranged in their reſpective degrees of diſtinction, as they bore relation, more or leſs remotely, to the leading principle of that philoſophy. But from thence he would paſs on to its rival ſyſtem, urged not merely by curioſity, but by the deſire of forming a judgment ſo material to the peace of his mind, as the choice of his religion, upon the fulleſt information. In this ſecond delineation of moral truth, he would find the leading principle totally different, and truths and virtues regarded through a different medium: in ſhort, no two things would appear ſo totally unlike as the rational religion of man, according to one, and ac-

cording to the other ſyſtem. From hence, diſtraction and uncertainty muſt ariſe in the mind of the inquirer; the more increaſing, the greater variety of ſyſtems he conſulted: that muſt terminate at laſt in endleſs heſitation, ſkepticiſm, univerſal doubt, and irreligion; or be determined by a preference, arbitrarily given to one ſyſtem, above all others, each in ſome reſpects equally deſerving of it. Such difficulties attend the expectation of finding the rational religion of man in any of the intellectual ſyſtems, that ancient philoſophy preſented to the world. Nor will the more modern ſyſtems of ethics and morality anſwer better the deſcription of true and complete religion. It is not to be queſtioned, but that it has been thought practicable, to conſtruct a complete delineation of religion from the deductions of reaſon. The philoſophic mind, in ſearch of truth, applying one day to one branch of inquiry, the next to another, expands itſelf without confinement, and wherever it puſhes its reſearch, perceives the difficulties yield to inveſtigation, and experiences no material obſtructions to ſtop its career. Hence, accuſtomed to contemplate wiſdom in its branches, and not perceiving any, that are eſſential, to lie out of its ſphere; the mind is

apt

apt to preſume, that it is as eaſy to comprehend the whole, as the parts in which it is contained: not duly weighing the immenſe magnitude of the object, far more indefinitely extended than reaſon itſelf. For conſidering truth in the variety and extent of its views, what life is equal to the contemplation of the ſeveral parts of an object, that has no aſcertainable limits? Nay, even ſuppoſing that each might be viewed diſtinctly, in the days and hours of which human life conſiſts, either by diligent inveſtigation, or in the ſyſtems in which they lie ſcattered and diſperſed: can the human capacity compriſe, arrange, methodize and comprehend that unmeaſurable ſyſtem of moral truth? The labours of philoſophy are nevertheleſs to be admired, and the liberal, the extenſive, the refined judgment, diſplayed in ethic precepts, have done credit to the human underſtanding: but to ſuppoſe any ſyſtem to exhibit a complete delineation of moral truth, would be to aſcribe infinite comprehenſion to a finite mind, and preſumptuouſly to arrogate a wiſdom, the incommunicable attribute of the ſupreme Being.

Let no man therefore ſeek the perfection of natural religion in any intellectual ſyſtem.

Philoſophy

Philoſophy or wiſdom; that is, the wiſdom of the world is one thing; but ethic prudence is another, and widely different. Obedience to the ſupreme Being, his maker, was an implanted ſenſe in the mind of man, before natural or moral evil had any exiſtence in the world. But when natural and moral evil gained admittance, then the diſtinction of good and evil aroſe in the mind, and the judgment of conſcience was eſtabliſhed, to continue, a common ſenſe, for ever; the teſt of human conduct, the lamp to guide man to the will of GOD, and aſſert the obligation to truth and virtue. (If on this ſubject, the moraliſt draws his intimations from the pages of ſacred hiſtory, let it never be made an objection to him: for facts coëval with the earlieſt age of man are recorded no where elſe). In this moral prudence[i], conſiſts the only true rational religion, a religion extended to every poſſible office, and to every moral agent univerſally. To this religion, accommodated, though it be, to all capacities, philoſophy in none of its delineations, ever did juſtice; a religion when united with the maxims of experience, could it fairly be tranſcribed, competent to

[i] Φρόνησις.

form

form an excellent moral character, and diſplay an exquiſite model of the perfect, fair and good, in practice. This alone has a title to the epithets of natural and rational religion: natural in a more obvious ſenſe than the philoſophical definition; inaſmuch as it deduces its obligation from the implanted diſcrimination of right and wrong, of good and evil: and rational, as ariſing from the uſe of reaſon, and as exiſting in common in every partaker of the faculty. It is a religion that has an inward teſtimony of the approbation of the ſupreme Being to coincide with it; and an inextinguiſhable hope (for had no promiſe been given, aſſurance had been preſumption) that the divine approbation would not be unattended with bleſſings and rewards. Here then we have unqueſtionably found a pure and holy religion, a religion conveying to its obſerver, of whatever claſs he be, an impreſſion of his duty, and together with it, the preſent reward of conſciouſneſs; not without hope, that man's natural deſire of immortality ſhall be gratified, and that in the future ſtate, the conſciouſneſs of virtuous conduct ſhall remain, a ſource of eternal pleaſure.

May we then cloſe our inquiries here, aſſured

assured that the great art[k] of life resides in this religion? That man in every station wherein he can be placed, cannot fail of finding here, whatever he can desire of direction in the arduous and the intricate; with comfort in the painful and laborious seasons of life? In short that this religion can assure him of peace of mind at all times?

But even in this case, some desiderata may be regretted in the form and nature of this religion, such as may occasionally defeat these beneficial purposes of it. In the first place, this law is not so fixed and precise as written laws are by their construction: and secondly, the state of even rational hope of future reward, without assurance, does not amount to perfect satisfaction.

With respect to the first, though this may not seem a very material objection, since man has within him a certain criterion of duty, a law, as Cicero[l] asserts of self preservation, "to which we are not trained, but formed:" yet a very different opinion is not unfounded. In the contemplation of national character, a considerable fluctuation appears in the notions and manners of men from time to

[k] Nullum Numen abest, si sit Prudentia. Juvenal.
[l] Pro Milo.

time:

time: which, though it does not commonly riſe ſo high, as to obliterate any ſtrong lines in the diſtinction of good and evil; yet very commonly, in its changes, by the contagion of general practice, tends to relax the ſtrictneſs of virtue; and ſometimes, to give the authority of cuſtom and example to conduct highly unbecoming. Beſides, when turbulent and libidinous affections exert their reſiſtleſs force, like boiſterous winds in a ſtormy ſea; the voice of prudence and conſcience, like the pilots art, avails but little againſt the raging elements. In both theſe caſes no ſuch clear guide is to be found in human prudence, as exiſts in written laws. For theſe can never fluctuate; but however example may ſophiſticate, or paſſion impel, theſe conſtantly exhibit the ſame invariable teſt of obligation.

As to a future recompence of virtue; without a divine promiſe no greater aſſurance indeed can be had, than rational hope founded on arguments drawn from the attributes of God. But then, though a full aſſurance were certainly to be wiſhed, in a point ſo material as well to the virtue as happineſs of mankind; yet in default of this, the mind might well acquieſce in a hope founded on the beſt evidence of which the queſtion was capable.

But

But alas! far greater difficulties remain behind. Far more alarming conſiderations muſt occupy the mind of man, than doubts whether his virtue ſhall meet with a future recompenſe. The ſame divine juſtice which warrants his hope of reward, at the ſame time alarms his fears; his fear leſt tranſgreſſion alſo ſhould meet its juſt doom hereafter; and leſt divine vengeance, though not now inflicted in proportion to demerit, be only reſerved to a future day of reckoning, when every offence ſhall be found accurately recorded, and receive its puniſhment in an exact retribution.

It was the fallacy of the tempter, we are told, when he ſeduced our firſt parents; that, by tranſgreſſion, their eyes ſhould be opened, and they ſhould be as Gods, knowing good and evil. What was here offered as a privilege, followed indeed as a conſequence. They knew evil immediately, by experience, and by the contraſt, perceived the value of that good from which they had ſwerved. The diſtinction of moral good and evil, whether at that time divinely impreſſed upon the human mind, or only then firſt perceived, by the experience of evil, was

[m] Raro antecedentem ſceleſtum
Deſeruit Pœna, Pede claudo. Horace.

certainly

certainly a gracious gift, and neceſſary to man in the ſtate to which he was reduced. For, as the nature and will of GOD are unchangeable, the violations of moral truth, and the indulgence of impure affections, muſt be held by him in abomination, and render the criminal odious to him, and obnoxious to his ſevere diſpleaſure. When man was therefore in a capacity to commit every enormity, but more eſpecially if he became ſtrongly inclined and prone to evil; it would have been inconſiſtent with the mercy and the juſtice of GOD, that he ſhould incur the divine diſpleaſure, and his own condemnation at the ſame time, without the conſciouſneſs of offence. And yet, unleſs the diſtinction of good and evil had exiſted in the human mind, to ſerve as a law to him, by what teſt could he have diſcerned the moral or immoral tendency of his conduct? Or by what power of divination could he have conceived, that thoſe actions to which the propenſities of his nature inclined him, were contrary to the will of his maker? Thus by the law of reaſon, aroſe the knowledge[n] of ſin: it was a law, implanted to ſerve as a check and caution againſt the in-

[n] Rom. c. 4.

dulgence

dulgence of depraved appetites. This natural and rational religion, by no means, failed of giving to man full information of the beauty and desirable nature of virtue, as well as of the deformity of vicious conduct. But while conscience enforced this rule by a decisive judgment in favour of the one and against the other, a judgment which no influence or seduction could bend or suppress: man ever found himself strongly influenced by another law, which St Paul [o] has named the law in his members. This perverse inclination and propensity of the mind to evil, is a matter of fact, which is equally true or false according to the evidence of it; whether the manner in which evil was introduced can either be accounted for rationally or not: or whether it can or cannot be reconciled with the preconceptions which any one may have formed of divine providence, or the moral government of the supreme Being. This depravity is a truth amply attested by the sages [p] of ancient times, and acknowledged in their writings. In this observation, philosophers perfectly agree with apostles. Thus, St Paul describes the state of man as truly desperate where he delivers

[o] Rom. c. 8.

[p] Plato. Apol. Soc. de Repub. L. VI. Phæd.

himself

himſelf in the character of a man led by the light of nature: "[q] I delight in the law "of GOD, after the inward man; but I ſee "law in my members warring againſt the "law of my mind, and bringing me into "captivity to the law of ſin that is in my "members." And Cicero[r] in the terms of his deſcription is not at all behind the apoſtle. "If nature," ſays he, „ had ſo fra- "med us, that we could look into and per- "ceive her, we might form our life under "her as our beſt guide; nor have recourſe "to reaſon and the cultivation of it. But "as it is, ſhe has given us but little ſparks "of light, which we quickly extinguiſh by "corrupt manners and depraved opinions, "ſo that the light of nature is no where "diſcernable."—"Indeed whatever intima- "tions men receive, whether from the ſug- "geſtions of nurſes in early age, the inſtruc- "tions of parents, the precepts of maſters, "the authority of books, and of general "and popular opinions; all, all conſpire to "breed them up in error; ſo that truth is "obliged to give place to vanity, and nature "herſelf to prejudice." Thus far the Ro- man philoſopher. With the will of GOD,

[q] Rom. c. 8. [r] Tuſc. Quæſt. L. III. Præf.

with

with the ſuggeſtions of reaſon, with the dictates of natural conſcience, the concupiſcence of depraved nature, the falſe opinions and prejudices of the world, were not to be reconciled. And hence, as the concurring teſtimony of philoſophers and inſpired writers uniformly deſcribe the caſe of infatuated man, the whole ſpecies whether taken collectively or individually, had all of them gone out of the way[s]: they had fallen univerſally into a depravity of manners and opinions, and were altogether become abominable and: alſo there were none that did good, either uniformly or generally, no not one.

The true and effectual religion of perſons ſo circumſtanced, is not ſufficiently defined, as the religion of rational beings, unleſs their caſe, as ſinners, be provided for. How then does the religion of reaſon apply to this caſe? How does it anſwer the exigencies of ſuch perſons?

For the ſake of argument, let us ſuppoſe the caſe of a man unconſcious of actual tranſgreſſion. Even in this man (who however never exiſted) the emotions of his mind muſt frequently give him the experience of

[s] Pſalm. 14. Rom. c. 3.

evil,

evil, together with the conſciouſneſs of offence ariſing from perverſe inclinations. Senſibilities theſe, which muſt frequently invade his peace; at leaſt, till he had fortified and ſecured his mind by virtuous habits. By what ſelf deluſion then; or, let it be perſuaſion, could even this man preſume that he poſſeſſed the original integrity, and unconſcious purity of mind, in which the author of his being at firſt created him, and deſigned him to ſubſiſt? Such aſſurance is not to be found in reaſon, nor can any thing but a divine act of grace confer it. But the caſe of actual tranſgreſſors is deſperate. For ſince by the law of reaſon, enforced as it is by the awards of conſcience, the Wrath [t] of God is plainly declared, as if revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men; whoſe conduct ſoever amounted not to the purity and perfection, which the dictates of his mind required of him; that is, whoſoever "held "the truth perceived and acknowledged by "him," in unrighteouſneſs; this man was reſerved under the curſe of the law, and condemnation of his own mind, without rational reſource, to the final vindication of

[t] Rom. c. 1. v. 18.

God's juſtice, in the puniſhment of offenders.

Wretched ſtate of man! From whence could he derive conſolation, to ſooth the anguiſh [u] of his mind? Would repentance or contrition reſtore to him the ſerene conſcience, and peace of innocence? "Go [w] to "any court of judicature and ſee whether "the ſorrow and concern expreſſed by the "convict, will reſcue him from the uplifted "ſword of civil juſtice." Can they then reverſe the decrees of inviolable truth, and inflexible juſtice? If they can indeed, what is truth, what is juſtice? It is not in reaſon therefore to conſtruct a religion for ſinners. "For [x] the fear of puniſhment, branded on "guilt by the Almighty, being both natu- "ral and rational, it is impoſſible that either "nature or reaſon ſhould afford any aſſiſ- "tance, or ſufficient remedy againſt this "terror, unleſs indeed reaſon and nature be "made up of contradictions."

To ſum up the whole of this important argument. When we take a view of the ſtate of man, under the guidance of reaſon;

[u] I cannot ſee any rational expiation in ſacrifices, and therefore cannot admit them as a reſource.

[w] Bp Sherlock's Diſc. Vol. II.

[x] Vol. II. Diſc. 13. p. 2.

we

we find him bound to the performance of duties, ſuggeſted to him by moral prudence, and enforced by conſcience. Theſe ſuggeſtions form the only true religion of nature and reaſon, a religion not repoſited in the writings of the wiſe; but divinely engraven upon the hearts of men. A religion indefinable, like the ſimpleſt natural ideas: to which philoſophy and ſpeculation added nothing, but rather perplexed and involved it: perplexed it with intricacies and refinements, whereby it was rendered unſerviceable to the far greater part of mankind; and involved the plaineſt dictates in the uncertainty of various doctrines; thereby bewildering the inquirer in doubts, that had he conſulted only the occaſional ſuggeſtions of his mind, never had ariſen. But to this religion, no man ever has paid a perfect obedience; yet reaſon, a pure moral ſenſe, an emanation from the conſummate truth, purity and perfection of the ſupreme Being; could apply no remedy for the deviations; but conſigned the offender, without reſource, a prey to the fears and remorſe of conſcience. And when, in the anguiſh of a depreſſed and perturbed ſpirit he implored pardon, reconciliation, hope, to reſtore ſerenity to his mind: when he anxiouſly inquired whether

there were no methods of expiation, no way to mercy, no door of hope for penitent ſinners in the counſels of gracious heaven, no balm efficacious as that in Gilead to the repentant Iſraelite; his religion was ſilent and returned no anſwer.

From hence it appears that natural religion is not competent to anſwer to degenerate man the purpoſes of religion. That it can neither enable him to paſs through life with peace of mind and the ſerenity of conſciouſneſs; nor at the cloſe of it, to quit the ſcene, ſupported by the pleaſing hope of a bleſſed immortality.

SER-

SERMON III.

MATT. XI. 28.

Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt.

SUCH is the invitation of the divine author of the chriſtian religion. When rational religion was not able to afford reſt and ſatisfaction to the burthened mind; nor all the powers of the underſtanding, aided by all the refinements of the moſt exquiſite cultivation: when wiſdom, when philoſophy had failed of conſtructing ſuch a ſyſtem as was applicable to the ſtate of man, or anſwerable to his wants: the ſupreme Being himſelf condeſcended to the infirmities of his creatures, and gave them a new diſpenſation every way ſuited to the exigencies of their ſituation. The religion of reaſon is

 truly

truly repreſented, as a pure and holy law, fixed as the throne of GOD, and immutable, like that truth, that juſtice, from whence it was tranſcribed. As ſuch, it could neither bend to the weakneſs, nor accommodate itſelf to the wants of ſinners; but exacted obedience, or the penalty of tranſgreſſion, with the ſtern inflexibility of a lawgiver. In the deplorable ſtate of man, [a] when this law, through tranſgreſſion, had become a miniſtration of condemnation; divine mercy has effected what the Law could not do, in that it was weak, through the fleſh. The goſpel was ſent from heaven, to be a remedy for ſinners, an act of grace to proſtrate convicts, a reſource and conſolation to the miſerable and deſperate. By this revelation our great Creator is repreſented, as a being, not indeed to be reconciled to ſin; but of inexpreſſible compaſſion to the ſinner. Here the burthened conſcience finds an effectual atonement for tranſgreſſion, a ſacrifice and victim offered to the eſſential juſtice of the divine will; and here, accepted means of propitiation. Thus, the ſupreme aſſertor of truth is reconciled to offenders, and divine love and favour are reſtored to ſinful creatures: thus

[a] Rom. c. 8. v. 3.

the

the burthen and oppreſſion of guilt are removed, and the mind of man, now relieved, is gilded with an inward peace, enlivening as the conſciouſneſs of virtue. Such is a juſt eulogy of the chriſtian covenant of redemption; which is ever repreſented in the ſacred writings, as an act of grace, and unmerited kindneſs to the human ſpecies.

For when the ſtate of [b] natural man is conſidered, as the word of GOD and moral inquirers repreſent him; he appears wholly [c] given over to a reprobate and corrupted mind. [d] And the law in his members warring ſucceſsfully againſt the law of his mind holds him captive, a ſlave to corruptions that the inward man abhors, a wretched example of infatuation, and [e] monument of the ſevere, but righteous judgment of GOD. Or (to expreſs the ſame truths in the language of the natural man's confeſſions) through defect of the juſt ſubjection of animal and ſenſual appetite to the control of the moral powers, the reaſon, and the underſtanding; the bent of the human inclination, and his ruling paſſion, are turned, greatly more than is fitting, to the gratification of the animal nature; while the rational deſires are ne-

[b] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 14. [c] Mente captus. [d] Rom. c. 1. v. 26, 28. c. 7. v. 22. [e] Iſ. c. 29. v. 14.

glected,

glected, the ſober dictates of the diſtinguiſhing faculties of man. Hence ſo great a degeneracy is produced, that were the deſires to which man addicts himſelf, to be taken as the indications of what became him; they would exhibit a religion (if it can be ſo ſaid without proſtituting a ſacred name) that would bear no reſemblance, or conformity to reaſon, to purity, or to moral truth. Through this aſcendency of depraved appetite, man's underſtanding alſo is perverted, ſo as to be rendered incapable of entertaining moral ſentiment, anſwerable to the excellence of genuine rational dictate; and moreover not leſs incapable of enforcing thoſe precepts of reaſon effectually, which the mind clearly approves, by rational ſanctions. For, by natural conſequence, every moral delinquency, and much more, every habitual deſertion of moral rectitude, [f] diſturb the ſoundneſs and integrity of the mind, and produce an infatuation, approaching much nearer in degree to inſanity, than the word infatuation, in common uſe, expreſſes. This conſequence the heathen writers attributed to a judicial ſentence of the Gods: from whence the mimic poets borrowed the

[f] Cic. Orat. in Piſ. §. 23.

tragic

tragic frenzy of Oreſtes, and the burning torches of the Furies. [g] Iſaiah alſo remarks this infatuation in that memorable paſſage, urged by our Lord, and by St Paul, more than once, againſt the unbelieving Jews: and his words would ſeem to confirm the notion of a judicial infatuation, [h] were not this mode of ſpeech uſual in the old teſtament, and in jewiſh writings, where there appears to be no intention to expreſs any judicial interpoſition of ſupernatural agency. Into ſuch corruption and degeneracy, mankind had fallen; a ſtate, which cannot be contraſted with the character ſuggeſted and preſcribed by the law of reaſon, without ſetting apoſtate man in a light ſo far different from an object of the benignity of a GOD of truth; as to make him appear vile and abominable, in the ſight of that pure and holy being. And moreover, by the captivity and infatuation of his mind, he was become incapable of turning himſelf from the perverſe paths in which he trod, to cultivate a more perfect morality. In this forlorn condition, whatever was done for his redemption, muſt be effected without the

[g] Iſ. c. 6. v. 9. Jo. c. 12, 39. and its paral. paſſ. Acts c. 28. v. 25. Rom. c. 11. v. 8.

[h] Whitby on Rom. c. 11. v. 8.

cooperation

cooperation of infatuated man: and thus abandoned, there was no way, in reaſon, open to him to recover the divine favour, or eſcape the vengeance of divine juſtice. Wherefore, the redemption of man is to be attributed ſolely to the immeaſurable liberality of the beſt and greateſt of beings, and to be acknowledged with all gratitude, a moſt ſeaſonable act of free grace, of undeſerved mercy. The goſpel therefore is the religion of Sinners. [i] It is adapted to relieve the burthened and heavy laden; [k] to bind up thoſe that are broken in heart, and give them medicine to heal their ſickneſs.

Such the neceſſities of man, ſo abſolutely gracious the chriſtian diſpenſation. But the goſpel is a ſubject far exceeding the comprehenſion of any created being, a myſtery, [l] which even angels deſire to look into. And ſo great is "[m] the depth of the riches of the "goodneſs of GOD; that his doings are "unſearchable, and his ways paſt finding "out." As to man, a creature, in his utmoſt natural proficiency, removed at an infinite diſtance from the knowledge of the righteouſneſs of GOD: he can know no more of the diſpenſations and the divine

[i] Matt. c. 22. v. 11. c. 9. v. 10. [k] Pſ. 147. v. 3.
[l] 1 Pet. c. 1. v. 12. [m] Rom. c. 11. v. 33.

economy

economy than is revealed: and even of that portion, the perception muſt be ſuch alone as he can derive immediately from the ſacred oracles themſelves. Yet, if accompanied with an entire deference of judgment to the divine word, the contemplation of this ſtupendous inſtance of God's providence over the moral world, will ſerve to many uſeful purpoſes; the ſubject being adapted to elevate and improve the mind of man, and to give him proper ſentiments of himſelf and of the ſupreme Being.

Though the chriſtian religion was ſo entirely an act of grace; and though the Son of God freely offered himſelf, an atonement for tranſgreſſion; yet the redemption was not applied indiſcriminately to all; but a faith, deſcriptive of thoſe ſentiments, which are neceſſary qualifications for perſons circumſtanced as believers are, [n] was demanded, as requiſite to the divine acceptance. When this is conſidered, the infatuation which appears ſo univerſally to have pervaded the ſpecies, at the time when the goſpel was delivered, may render the numerous converſions to the pure faith in Chriſt hardly to be accounted for, without embra-

[n] Matt. c. 20. v. 16.

cing

cing the opinion of the fataliſts, which attributes them to a ſupernatural overbearing influence. But, without leſſening the impreſſion of the power of GOD ſo graciouſly exerted for the redemption of mankind; there is the cleareſt teſtimony, in the writings of heathen moraliſts, to prove, that though the depravity of the human mind ſhed ſo baneful an influence on his manners; it did not take from him the conſciouſneſs that thoſe manners were not ſuch as became a rational agent: and though the infatuation was ſo great as to occaſion him continually to [o] chooſe bitter for ſweet, and ſweet for bitter; it did not proceed ſo far, as to ſatisfy him, that ſo abſurd a choice was either juſt in reaſon, or conducive to his happineſs. Herein the goſpel was adapted to the ſtate of man. The obedience of faith is an obedience to preſcription, which conveys a far different idea, from perfect rectitude of moral ſentiment. Our lord did not lay down a complete ſyſtem of ethic precept, and demand a conformity to it in ſentiment and manners, as the conditional qualification for his favour. This muſt have been demanded in vain of man conſtituted as he is. Inſtead

[o] If. c. 5. v. 20.

of

of this, the requiſites to admittance into the chriſtian covenant, were ſuch as man had full powers to exhibit: a ſenſe of his wants and infirmity, a deſire to recover a better ſtate, and a tractable temper, to obey the plaſtic hand of his new maſter. As the goſpel ordained ſuch terms of acceptance it was truly a religion, and the duty required was ſtrictly moral. It was the ſame indeed, as had ever been acknowledged, by the name of obedience, paſſive obedience, to be a becoming expreſſion of piety under natural evils; from the conſideration of an overruling providence. But the chriſtian revelation did not ſtop here, it did not abandon the believer, when initiated, to follow the ſame perverſe conduct, which marked his unregenerate character: but vindicated the eſſential purity of the divine will, by forming a diſcipline for the improvement of the accepted ſervants, that ſhould produce no mean accompliſhment of character, in principle and virtuous conduct.

But whoever ſhall conſider the goſpel only as a religion, will form a very inadequate idea of this grace of GOD. The redeemer of mankind is ſet forth in two points of view by the prophet [p] Iſaiah in a paſſage cited by [q] St

[p] Iſ. c. 49. v. 6. [q] Acts c. 13. v. 47.

Paul:

Paul: "It is a light thing," (ſays the Almighty of him) "that thou ſhouldeſt be "my ſervant, to raiſe up the tribes of Jacob, "and to reſtore the preſerved of Iſrael. I "will alſo give thee for a light to the gen-"tiles, that thou ſhouldeſt be my ſalvation "to the end of the earth." In this laſt mentioned character, as the reſtorer of man to the favour of his maker, and to the rational hope of acceptance by that ſupreme arbiter of human conduct, and human deſtiny; he left his father's throne: and laying aſide the refulgence of the divine image, took upon him the human form, and therein expiated, by a vicarious ſuffering, the guilt of ſin, and made an effectual atonement for tranſgreſſion: of this mercy, unregenerate man is the object, who is made partaker of it, when he is taken into covenant with GOD. In the other character, [r] as a light of the world, he is conſidered as a prophet and a lawgiver; and the objects of this miniſtry are men already taken into covenant: men, who are, by profeſſion, hearers of his word; and who are put under the diſcipline of the goſpel, to learn in what manner to conduct themſelves, ſo as to pleaſe the ſupreme Being.

[r] Iſ. c. 8. v. 12. Pl. 112. v. 9, 105.

When

When the gospel is considered as a doctrine revealed for the instruction of the believer, after his initiation; this circnmstance will appear in it, as in rational religion. Its precepts are not delivered in a system. For though revealed religion must of necessity be exhibited in writing to all, who live at a distance of time and place from those, wherein the revelation was made; yet by none of the inspired writers, is the christian religion delivered in a regular formulary; but left in detached precepts, occasional prescriptions, and determinations of moral cases; and moreover, its principles, for the most part, are taught in parables. And as the philosophers who have attempted to exhibit rational dictate in a system, have never done justice to a religion that had real pretensions to a descent from consummate intelligence; so (I speak under correction) christian religion has never received an adequate representation, where an attempt has been made to comprehend its principles in a systematical delineation. As it comes, under its own peculiar form, it is attended with singular advantages. The christian is obliged hereby to be more versed in the sacred books; while it is from such converse, and not any occasional reference, that he can discern the will

will of GOD, in cases which he may wish to refer to it. Under the same idea, the gospel is calculated to try the disposition of the professor; because (as it does not abound in cases of casuistry) it leaves him, for the most part, under the guidance of his own discretion; though that discretion be still regulated by the principles and general tenor of the christian doctrine. Of course, his conduct becomes the test, as it is the fruit of his faith; and thus, at his own infinite hazard, he receives the doctrines of GOD with partial submission, and abides by the consequences of subduing, whether partially or entirely, his own prejudices, to the obedience of faith. Thus also, every stage of the christian pilgrimage through life, becomes a state of discipline, and a stage of improvement; while the conviction, the practical assent, the resources of christianity open gradually upon his mind; and remove, by degrees that bear proportion to his improvement, the blindness of the natural man (as St Paul expresses himself) or the infatuation and weakness of the animal dictates, and faculty of understanding (as a heathen moralist would express the same idea). Upon the whole; the scriptures are sufficiently instructive; and as they inform the understanding

ſtanding of the faithful, ſuperſede the uſe of a ſyſtem, by reſtoring him, as it were, to that original rectitude of diſpoſition; when, without the diſtinction of good and evil, without any law of works and righteouſneſs, his ways were upright, his judgment ſound, and manners pleaſing to his maker.

Does the goſpel then, in preſcribing the obedience of faith, ſeek to lay mankind under a yoke of ſuperſtition? It is rather to be embraced as a gracious ſcheme calculated to vindicate the rights of man to ſound judgment, and aſſert his claim to free ſentiment: inaſmuch as it removes all thoſe impediments, by which the underſtanding was obſtructed, and the moſt deſirable objects of human knowledge were involved in clouds and thick darkneſs.

But in order that a true notion of the goſpel, as a religion be entertained, let theſe oppoſite impreſſions be corrected with equal care. On the one ſide, let it not be ſuppoſed that it removes the obligations to attend to the moral intimations of prudence, either as if it eſtabliſhed a new and more extended ſyſtem of ordinance, or made void the ordinances of reaſon, in compaſſion to the infirmity of man. On the other ſide let not the

idea of it as the mere reſtoration of natural religion be admitted, except it be with the moſt preciſe limitation. For under this idea it forms a pretence, to the curious ſkeptical chriſtian for receiving the goſpel incompletely; with avowed exception to every doctrine that he cannot reconcile with his prepoſſeſſions.

Let not then the religion of Chriſt be ſuppoſed to require a more perfect righteouſneſs than the genuine religion of right reaſon. But that we fall not into error, right reaſon muſt be underſtood abſtractedly, as equivalent to moral truth cognizable by man. Had the goſpel laid additional burthens on man, inſtead of a covenant of mercy, it had been a rigorous law indeed, a ſentence of inevitable wrath and condemnation. For as the religion of moral and rational dictate formed a rule ſo pure and perfect in its nature, that man could never follow it exactly; to what uſe could an extended moral obligation ſerve to ſuch a creature, but to conſign him to wrath without remedy, to plunge him deeper in tranſgreſſion, and aſcertain his condemnation? But in truth, as the line of moral dictate is commenſurate to the rational and moral powers of the agent, had the chriſtian lawgiver extended it, theſe powers of comprehenſion

prehenſion alſo muſt have been enlarged. But had he done this, or in any reſpect altered the repreſentations of original natural dictate, it would ſeem as if the great Creator had made men, at firſt, beings incompetent to the purpoſes of religion, the end of their exiſtence; and afterwards ſeeing the defect, like ſome human artiſt, had corrected and ſupplied it by a ſecond effort. A ſuppoſition that derogates from the wiſdom of the ſupreme artificer.

But if it were not the divine purpoſe to introduce a more perfect ſyſtem, much leſs could the intention be, to cancel the obligation to morality; or ſuperſede that religion, which has its foundation in the unchangeable will of GOD. For thoſe deviations from moral truth, which at any time were diſpleaſing to the deity, could at no time ceaſe to be ſo, or alter their moral name and nature. In truth, that religion which aroſe out of the implanted diſtinction of good and evil, muſt ever retain its influence with man, while common ſenſe remains, and that diſtinction continues. It muſt retain its influence, while native judgment, while natural conſcience, repreſent the good an object of deſire, of purſuit, of admiration; the evil, in its nature, vile, pernicious and deteſtable.

No extraordinary interpoſition of revelation can be ſuppoſed to ſet aſide a religion founded in the nature of things, however it may aſſiſt the moral agent in the performance of his duties; or publiſh an act of grace, and confer pardon, on offenders.

In oppoſition to theſe notions, let the religion of Chriſt be conſidered as a new revelation, indeed, of the will of GOD; but of that ſame invariable will, from whence every genuine dictate of nature, and every original intimation of right reaſon are equally tranſcribed. And let the diſpenſation be eſteemed as adapted to renew the advantages of religion to mankind; and give a clear light to their paths, who had deviated widely in ſentiment and manners from truth and rectitude. That the diſpenſation might anſwer theſe purpoſes, Chriſt has reſtored the principles of reaſon in points where they had been perverted. The law of [s] Forbearance is an example of this, as it is oppoſed to the ancient law of retaliation. He has indicated what is becoming and truly moral, more accurately than it had been ſtated by ethic writers. Thus in the place of the principle of juſtice; the chriſtian lawgiver [t] ſub-

[s] Matt. c. 5. v. 33. [t] Matt. c. 5. v. 43.

ſtitutes

ſtitutes the principle of charity, as a more ſocial principle, more becoming to man, more pleaſing to his maker. He has pointed out the line of truth, and exalted virtue, where it was ill underſtood before. Thus, in the inſtance of the good [u] Samaritan, our maſter has cancelled the vulgar limits of philanthropy, and made the objects of the ſocial obligations as numerous as the human ſpecies. He has inculcated the fundamental principles of morality by poſitive precept, thereby producing a written and unvarying teſt of the actions of men; a teſt, which no alterations of times, no fluctuation of manners and opinions, no circumſtances whatever can ſophiſticate or elude. But what is more: he has ſettled a ruling paſſion, that ſhall correſpond with religion in every application, and unite the moſt powerful inducements of deſire, with the ſuggeſtions of moral prudence. Such is the [w] precept of our divine inſtructor to expect the chief happineſs of man in the world to come; and ſeek, in the firſt place, to obtain an inheritance in the future kingdom of the Meſſiah. Laſtly: he has inforced the obligations of religion by additional and prevailing ſanctions. Nor let

[u] Luke c. 10. v. 36. [w] Matt. c. 27. v. 37, 39. [x] Matt. c. 6. v. 19.

it be doubted, whether the epithet of additional ſanctions be not applied to the life and immortality promiſed in the goſpel; with equal juſtice as that of prevailing ſanctions. Unqueſtionably, theſe doctrines receive freſh light from the goſpel. The hopes of men are confirmed by the inviolable word and promiſe of GOD: ſo that though life and immortality were ever ſo much the dictates of natural deſire, and the probable intimations of reaſon; ſtill eternal life, and a glorious immortality as annexed to virtue by the word of GOD, are ſanctions to religion peculiar to the goſpel.

So much aid given to the cultivation and practice of the moſt refined morality, may ſeem to juſtify the notion of thoſe, who call our religion the reſtoration of natural religion. It is indeed ſo; inaſmuch as it delivers precepts of moral truth, in an excellent ſtrain of purity and energy: and, when ſo embraced by faith, rather than apprehended, (at leaſt in any vulgar ſtage of proficiency) enforces them with more than rational ſanctions. But, in this expreſſion, natural religion is an equivocal term, and requires a definition. Whenever it is ſaid that chriſtianity is the reſtoration of natural religion, nothing more can juſtly be meant by the expreſſion:

expreſſion: than that, [y] when the genuine dictates of nature had been extinguiſhed or perverted, by corrupt lives and depraved opinions; the goſpel has given precepts, whereby [z] what is good and evil in the actions of man, agreeably to the ſtate in which he finds himſelf, may be accurately diſtinguiſhed. But ſtill, in no ſenſe can the goſpel be termed the ſame as natural religion. For how is the aſſertion to be proved? Where is that model to be found of natural religion, by compariſon of which with the religion of Chriſt, this affirmation may be eſtabliſhed? Is natural religion to be found in any of the ſyſtems that philoſophy has framed? Chriſtianity is greatly above them; correcting their miſconceptions, and expreſſing a more chaſte, more refined, more exquiſite morality, than they do. Has natural religion, (as [a] Cicero has defined it) its foundation in appetite; and is it diſtinct from the dictates of reaſon and learning? As the appetites now exiſt in man, their dictates are found equally oppoſite to the precepts of the chriſtian and every other national and pure religion: does natural religion then reſide in that perfect mind, that accompliſhed rea-

[y] Cicero. [z] Woolaſton. [a] Tuſc. Quæſ. L. III. Præf.

ſon,

ſon, that truth, on all ſides, ſeparate from error? How can chriſtianity be compared with ſo abſtract an idea, an exiſtence conceived, tho inaccurately; but never comprehended by any finite mind, or mind incorporated in matter? Or is natural religion, the dictate of that ideal mind, by which the human nature was informed in its primeval ſtate, 'ere ſin defaced the image? The chriſtian religion is widely different, it is the religion of ſinners, it is formed on a knowledge and experience of evil, which at that time had no place in the mind of man. What then? Is this religion a tranſcript from abſolute and conſummate truth itſelf? From that truth which exiſts not, but in the divine mind, which alone is perfect, and which alone it deſcribes? If this be the definition of natural religion: it is granted that the chriſtian religion, is indeed a [b] revelation of the mind of GOD; of that mind which is invariably the ſame for ever, conſtant, uniform, and immutable. But if the goſpel be juſtly named the reſtoration of natural religion only in this reſpect, the argument of its internal evidence vaniſhes entirely, as a proof of the divine authority of the chriſtian

[b] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 16.

revelation

revelation, to infidels, or ſkeptics. For, as theſe and every natural man, are [c] incapable of receiving the things of the ſpirit of GOD, what would ſuch an application be, but to bring a revelation of the mind of GOD to the bar of human judgment, for its trial? The argument has been thus ſtated [d]: "the "goſpel is credible, becauſe agreeable to "thoſe notions which men naturally have, "of GOD, and of themſelves." But can the economy of the divine diſpenſations be juſtly brought to this teſt? Are not theſe things of GOD [e] myſterious as that ſupreme and perfect mind, which lies far beyond the reach of human comprehenſion? With reſpect to the moral precepts indeed, which chriſtianity inculcates, human judgment will go farther; and it may be juſtly ſaid of theſe, that they agree, to the fulleſt amount of the uninfluenced dictates of the underſtanding, with the moſt general preconceptions of the perfect, fair, and good, as far as the mind is capable of ideas ſo abſtracted. But this coincidence will not juſtify the argument. For although no proof of it will be required by any proficient, or faithful diſciple: yet, before infidels, when it is

[c] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 14.
[e] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 9.
[d] Bradford. Boyle's Lect.

brought

brought to prove any thing, the agreement will not ſo readily be allowed. And when the controverſy is put upon this iſſue will it not be ſaid? If it be a good argument for receiving the chriſtian religion, that it is approved by right reaſon: ſuppoſe it could not be reconciled with right reaſon; would not that be ſufficient ground for rejecting it? And if one ſide of the propoſition be urged as concluſive, how can the other conſiſtently be rejected? Right reaſon then becomes the arbitrator between the ſupreme Being delivering his will, and his creatures; whether they ſhall pay any obedience, or not, to his injunctions. But right reaſon is an equivocal term alſo. My opinion is to me (without which indeed it would not be mine) what another man's is to him, and each man's to himſelf, with inconcievable variety: right reaſon. For as no man can ſee with the eye ſight, ſo neither can any man underſtand with the reaſon, or the faculties of another. As therefore no common ſtandard can be found, to which all men will ſubſcribe; every man's reaſon is to him, right reaſon: and according to this argument, ſubmiſſion to the word of God is irrational, nor is any man obliged to receive it, where his reaſon does not clearly approve and comprehend it.

If

If ſo, not the word of GOD, but every man's reaſon is to him the rule of his faith; and then, by conſequence, Manes, Arius, or any other Heretic, is as good a chriſtian, and as much in the faith, as Chryſoſtom or any of the champions of orthodoxy; and this, though it be allowed, at the ſame time, that the profeſſion of one man is agreeable to the word of GOD, and that of the other not ſo. Nay, the very ſame argument that juſtifies the opinion of every man, may be pleaded alſo as concluſive in vindication of his principles and manners, and this even to the conduct of the vileſt profligate. But if the general preconceptions be admitted, as the ſtandard of right reaſon, to which every man muſt ſubſcribe that would not be branded as abſurd; yet the number of theſe is by far too ſmall to ſerve as the teſt of any moral ſyſtem: But were they ever ſo numerous, even the principles of common ſenſe are human conceptions; and when the ravages made in the powers of men, by their deviations from truth be conſidered, it cannot appear unreaſonable that GOD ſhould refuſe to [f] ſubmit his manifeſtations to be tried by a teſt ſo inadequate. I conclude therefore

[f] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 11.

that

that the argument of internal evidence can only be applied with good effect, by the proficient in chriſtian knowledge, for the ſatisfaction of his own mind, and the aſſurance of his own faith; while he alone is poſſeſſed of the whole [g] of it, having a true conception of the chriſtian principles, on the one ſide; and on the other, [h] the moſt correct judgment in natural and moral principles. But to infidels and ſkeptics; and alſo to novices, it is propoſed to little purpoſe. They are liable to miſconceptions on either hand [i]: and moreover ſhould they take up the argument negatively themſelves; it would recoil, with a force hardly to be reſiſted, like elephants in battle, on the party that firſt employed it.

To conclude: had the Saviour of the world, only added to his character of a redeemer by expiation, the office of a prophet to teach the will of GOD; much had ſtill been wanting, to render the diſpenſation effectual to his gracious purpoſe. In the character of a [k] high prieſt, taken from among men, he became experienced in human infirmities; and being touched with ſuch ſympathetical feeling, he has conſtructed effectual

[g] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 16. [h] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 15. [i] 1 Cor. c. 2. [k] Heb. c. 5. v. 2.

methods

methods of ſanctification: appointing means to draw down divine aid and ſpiritual ſuccour, to renew to offenders the peace of conſciouſneſs, and the upright mind of integrity. Finally, as an accepted ſatisfaction, he has annexed to his gracious covenant, privileges equal to all that religion can beſtow. Acceptance with GOD producing peace of mind in this life, and to be followed by an eternal inheritance hereafter.

In this peace the chriſtian ſpends his days, deriving conſolation in every fortune, and at the cloſe of life: or rather exulting in confident hope that in the future kingdom of his Lord, he ſhall find eternal manſions of reſt, and peace, and bliſs.

SERMON IV.

LUKE XIV. 33.

Whoſoever he be of you that forſaketh not all that he hath, he canuot be my Diſciple.

AFTER having taken a general view of the goſpel, let us now approach nearer, and contemplate the ſtupendous ſcheme of redemption more cloſely; if peradventure we may graſp within our comprehenſion, a part of the immenſe ſtructure.

Though the ſon of GOD, in condeſcenſion to human infirmities, left his throne of glory to redeem mankind; and though the human ſpecies was not capable of doing any thing effectual to its own ſalvation: yet thoſe ſentiments are demanded, as qualifications, by the founder of our faith; which are requiſite to give a due eſtimation of the divine mercy, as

as well as to produce that acquieſcence of mind and judgment, without which no man can follow a preſcribed rule, or embrace a doctrine delivered to him.

When the human ſpecies through the induced, not natural weakneſs of its moral powers, and an infatuation of underſtanding, was become incapable of obtaining, by the aid of natural religion, the objects of religion: nay more, when natural religion itſelf, through the multiplied offences, into which mankind had fallen, had [a] become a law of condemnation univerſally: in this deplorable ſtate of man, the divine mercy, in the goſpel, revealed a gracious diſpenſation of redemption. A diſpenſation, in which the greateſt compaſſion to the ſpecies is manifeſted, on the one hand; and on the other, the moſt jealous attention to the vindication of conſummate truth and purity. But of the doctrines ſet forth in this divine manifeſtation, the limited and low conceptions, that man can frame of perfect moral qualities, will ever render human notions unworthy: unworthy of the dignity of the ſubject; though they may at the ſame time be ſuch, as ſhall do the higheſt credit to himſelf, and reflect

[a] Pſ. 14. v. 1, 2, 3. Rom. c. 3. v. 9.

a luſtre

a luſtre on his individual capacity. For in no ſcience are the gradations of improvement ſo various and diſcernible, as in this of ethics: where the conceptions that men form of the ſubjects it contains, improve in equal proportion to the refinement and exact diſcernment they have attained. This poſition may be illuſtrated, from what is very obſervable in the judgments of taſte. In muſick, for example, the vulgar ear is charmed with harmonious ſounds, and diſguſted by any groſs diſſonance, or any greatly diſcordant period. But the vulgar ear is alike inſenſible to thoſe delicate agreements, or thoſe more minute inaccuracies in compoſition, which reſpectively delight or ſhock the maſter, and critics of real taſte. So it is in morals: the diſtinction of right and wrong, of good and evil, is impreſſed upon the moſt vulgar minds; but the conceptions of moral qualities, as of juſtice, fortitude, temperance and prudence; and ſtill more, of the more general ideas of the true, the becoming and the uſeful, admit of indefinite refinements, according to the cultivated diſcernment, and the improved diſcretion of the moraliſt. From hence it ariſes, that of moral precepts alſo, wherever they are found, whether in chriſtian doctrine, or rational dictate, men form

conceptions more or leſs juſt and accurate, according to their moral taſte. But this taſte, is not produced, like refinements in ſpeculative ſcience, by elaborate diſquiſition; in any degree ſo certainly, as it is by virtuous conduct, and the cultivation of religious character. In this reſpect, the moraliſt, and the practitioners of the fine arts are circumſtanced alike. The theory may be cultivated very diligently, and yet not ſeconded by a proportionable execution: but it is from practice, conſtant practice alone, according to the beſt rules, that the ſkill, the delicacy of expreſſion are to be attained, which diſtinguiſh the execution of the accompliſhed artiſt. So alſo in ethics: the ſcience may be cultivated in theory, without producing any excellent maxims, or laudable accompliſhments; it is from exerciſe alone that thoſe reſpectable examples of virtuous conduct, from experience that thoſe admirable maxims have been formed, that do real honour to the ſcience.

In the gracious ſcheme of redemption, divine compaſſion has found an atonement for tranſgreſſion, divine compaſſion has applied a remedy to the deep wounds made by former deviations, and [b] broken the rod of

[b] Iſ. c. 9. v. 4.

the

the oppreſſor, under which, in the hand of conſcience man continually ſmarted. But mercy and truth are equally attributes that coincide in the divine will; and they muſt of neceſſity meet alſo, and unite in every diſpenſation that flows from thence. That a creature, though an offender, ſhould be an object of the compaſſion of his creator, is entirely conſiſtent with every idea of the divine goodneſs: that the puniſhment and death even of the ſinner, ſhould grieve (to ſpeak humanly) the univerſal father, excites no aſtoniſhment: that the judge of all the earth ſhould [c] temper juſtice with equity, and make every allowance, that the moſt candid conſtruction of the caſe would admit, appears right, and agreeable to every moral attribute. But, that divine vengeance ſhould ceaſe to purſue the tranſgreſſor, that GOD ſhould be reconciled to the offender, even when he was become ſo degenerate as to have depraved his moral ſenſe; herein conſiſts the myſtery of divine compaſſion, a myſtery not explicable by any natural genius, any moral light, or refinement within the reach of human penetration. Yet ſtill, the eſſential purity of the divine nature, a purity

[c] Bp Sherlock, Vol. III. Diſc. 8.

never to be reconciled to offence, in whatever light the offender ſtand allied, requires the ſanctification of the objects of divine mercy and acceptance; [d] that they ſhould be redeemed from all iniquity, and ſo purified as to become a peculiar people unto GOD, zealous of good works.

But upon contraſting the ſtate of [e] natural man with ſuch a ſtate of becoming ſentiment; much will appear requiſite to be done, 'ere this apoſtate can be rendered a fit object of the final acceptance of his maker.

When GOD made man, at the beginning, and deſigned him to be a rational and a moral creature; beſides the appetites with which he furniſhed him in common with the brute ſpecies, he endowed him with the faculties of the underſtanding, that he might form the principles of his knowledge and conduct, by his judgment and diſcretion.

If the great creator did ſo impreſs any ideas on the human mind, as that ſuch ideas ſhould become innate, theſe would be prepoſſeſſions; which, being derived from that ſupreme and perfect mind, muſt be agreeable to truth and rectitude: and this concluſion would follow, that the natural prepoſſeſſions

[d] Tit. c. 2. [e] 1 Cor. c. 2.

of

of man, were to truth and rectitude. [f] But it is much to be queſtioned whether there be any ſuch innate impreſſions. Still however if not, and if the mind be at firſt totally uninformed, and a mere raſa tabula; yet, without queſtion, there is in every rational mind, an [g] accommodation to truth, with an aptitude to embrace it where it appears, an admiration of it, and inherent deſire to ſeek after, and diſcover it. From this love of truth it is, that the infant no ſooner opens his eyes, than, from every object of perception, he collects ſimple apprehenſions; and that, even before, by the acquiſition of the faculty of ſpeech, he can deſcribe to others, the impreſſions, which theſe perceptions have made upon his mind.

Nor is the interval long, before, in obedience to theſe impreſſions, he embraces thoſe [h] firſt principles, the principles of commou ſenſe; which, as they are ſcarcely removed from perception, are no more to be controverted, than the ſimpleſt apprehenſions. Hitherto there is but little room for the exerciſe of the judgment or diſcretion, the mind being accommodated, in ſuch a manner, as to take its direction, as it were,

[f] Locke. [g] Cic. de Offic. [h] Locke.

 neceſſarily.

neceſſarily. So truly admirable are the diſpenſations of our great and good Creator! Who has proportioned the moral taſk of man to his growing capacity, directing him by an influence almoſt irreſiſtible in his firſt conceptions; which are, and muſt be collected, long before his judgment could aſſiſt him in making any diſcriminations. Hitherto likewiſe of courſe all men think alike, and theſe principles are juſtly denominated of common ſenſe; though they widely differ from the προλήψεις of the philoſophers, which are far more abſtracted from perception, than theſe firſt notions, the only univerſal principles and elements of knowledge. But at the principles of common ſenſe no man ever ſtopped, not even one of thoſe whoſe lot in life confines them to daily labour, and whoſe minds, for want of uſe and education, are incapable, not of any abſtractions only; but even of drawing a train of concluſions in detail, from obvious principles. Peculiar maxims of prudence, principles for the conduct of life, and a ruling paſſion; with various other notions and informations, are collected by all men (framed by combining the original notices) from the concluſions which ſtrike each mind reſpectively, either in the progreſs or reſult of its diſquiſitions.

In

In this important exercise of discretion, though the first principles on which it is conducted be so universal; yet the conclusions are not uniform, but the ruling passions of men, their characters, their maxims of prudence, and also their notions and opinions vary as much as their features and complections.

Of every exercise of the understanding, truth is the object; in which assertion moral and prudential as well as philosophical and speculative disquisitions are included: for virtue and truth are so allied, that what in speculation is truth, is virtue in practice. Were the mind perfect in its operations, it would embrace nothing but truth, in all its disquisitions; those the most abstract, as well as the most obvious. And though the regions of cognizable truth be indefinitely extended, far beyond the comprehension of a finite mind; yet whatever information struck upon the perfect understanding, it would be received with the just distinction it deserved. Wherefore, as truth is uniform, that observable difference of opinion and character, by which the same position is erroneous upon one system, which is a principle of truth in another, must arise from partial consideration, and defects in the operations of the mind.

mind. From these defects it proceeds, that truth and virtue in an abstract sense, on the one side; and the opinions and prudential characters of men on the other; agree, by no means, in every feature, or perfectly in any. The origin of false notion and moral evil, or (allow me the expression) of speculative and practical error, can never be satisfactorily accounted for in reason; because it argues a degeneracy in the moral powers, and the faculty of understanding; which cannot be supposed originally incompetent to the perception of truth, or the attainment of knowledge; since truth and knowledge are its natural objects. That such a depravity exists in fact, the [i] observation of writers of all ages, the examples recorded in history, amply testify. The sacred page alone, in which the fall of man is recorded, and the consequences of that original transgression, affords a satisfactory account, how man has become a slave to sensual appetites, and of course gross and perverse in his opinions. For using this account as a clew, no difficulty will arise from supposing the mind of man as little perfect in the investigation of spe-

[i] Ætas Parentum pejor avis, tulit
Nos nequiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiorem.

culative

culative and practical truth as we find it in fact. For [k] truth is simple and untainted, it needs only the single eye, the sound mind, to apprehend it: it wants not any tedious ambages to explain it, but, on the contrary, strikes with a native splendor. Yet the eye must be open to receive it: and whatever prepossessions are there, will bar the perception. For they will act as a byas and influence on the understanding; and wherever byas be, deliberation is not equal, but the mind, deprived of the aid of its judgment, is necessitated to an opinion; unless the force of truth be greater than the byas on the mind. Thus the evil eye is blinded, and led captive. There is a chaste veil, that screens true wisdom from unhallowed sight; and the evil eye seeks after her in vain, involved in the darkness of error, and bewildered in its own perversions. And thus it comes to pass, that the mind of man, now depraved, is incapable of that exquisite discernment, or the simplicity of judgment, by which alone it could explore absolute and perfect truths; or even embrace them if by any means, delivered in such perfection. To clear the human perception, it is requisite

[k] Euripides. Cic. Off. L. I. §. 4. Matt. c. 6. v. 22.

therefore

therefore that the perverſions of judgment be corrected; and in order that man may be patient of ſuch correction, he muſt have a due ſenſe of theſe perverſions; how incomplete his notions, how imperfect his principles are: in ſhort how weak, how defective his reaſoning, his moral powers. For if a philoſopher take a diſciple, who has adopted a falſe taſte, or falſe notions; unleſs he can firſt make him ſenſible of the wrong impreſſion he has received, all the precepts of true ſcience will be thrown away upon him: in like manner, if the diſciple of Chriſt be not firſt ſenſible of the perverſeneſs of his manners and opinions; he will find it impoſſible to embrace the purchaſed redemption with becoming gratitude; or to conform himſelf to the means appointed for his ſanctification. From hence the neceſſity of repentance and mortification appears: the neceſſity, that he who would receive the goſpel, ſhould put off (in the language of St Paul[1]) and crucify the old man, before the work of regeneration can have a beginning.

But the ſame contraſt, which has rendered the neceſſity of repentance, of the mortification and denial of former ſentiment ſo

[1] Gal. c. 5. v. 24.

apparent,

apparent, may poſſibly ſeem to repreſent the duty as abſolute in its nature; more abſolute, than in fact, would be practicable.

Had the goſpel been a complete ſyſtem of perfect truth, and were it required, in the idea of chriſtian faith, that the underſtanding ſhonld, at once receive it completely; the mind's eye muſt previouſly be rendered abſolutely ſingle, and the diſpenſation would exact, under the idea of repentance, of man, ſo infirmly conſtituted as man is, the renunciation, in one act, of every opinion, beyond the ſimpleſt apprehenſions of common ſenſe. But how had this been poſſible? To renounce the honeſt and neceſſary arts of the world: thoſe arts of induſtry, which conduce ſo manifeſtly to the enjoyment of life; thoſe liberal arts, the refined exerciſe of which diſtinguiſh an accompliſhed people; thoſe arts of government, which are ſo neceſſary in modes of civil policy, formed on models not of abſtract but of human wiſdom, is a hard and mortifying taſk indeed. But it is neceſſary upon this ſuppoſition; for theſe arts of the world are not attained without diligent application, or practiſed without conſtant aſſiduity: whereby the mind is ſecularized and diſſipated; and the thoughts turned into various channels, which ſhould

be

be applied intenſely to this one object, were a ſyſtem of perfect truth to be received. And yet, were theſe arts of the world to be renounced, it would derange entirely, and throw into confuſion the whole courſe of things below. Beſides, could man forego every favourite idea, the innocent offspring of the mind, the darling child of fancy, the production of imagined penetration? To cut off a hand and pluck out an eye, are operations far, far eaſier, than thus to reduce the mind once furniſhed, again to its uninformed ſtate. Had this been expected of mankind, by mere man it never could have been performed; nor could any thing, ſhort of an abſolute controlling influence, have effected ſo entire a change. But the diſcipline of the goſpel may ſubſiſt effectually without ſo abſolute a ſelf denial. This gracious diſpenſation takes men, infirm creatures, as it finds them: and, as they are ſuch, does not require of them a perfect mind either in ſentiment or manners, at any period. A [m] zeal for truth and virtue is widely different from the poſſeſſion; nor does this diſqualify men, except in ſome peculiar circumſtances, from cultivating the

[m] Tit. c. 2.

innocent

innocent and refined arts; or render it leſs their duty to adorn their holy profeſſion with the honourable and uſeful arts of this life. The limits ſet to the purſuit of theſe truly valuable objects (and the purſuit is certainly limited) are ever varying with the ſtate of the profeſſion of the goſpel. When GOD called the patriarch Abraham; [n] he took him away from his country and his kindred, that he might ſpend his days entirely under divine direction, and fulfil, under the guidance of heaven the myſterious purpoſes of providence. Throughout this patriarch's life, a continual manifeſtation was interpoſed for his protection, and amply to ſupply the uſes of worldly connexions and political laws. In ſuch circumſtances, his abſtraction from the world, became as it were entire. Happy, thrice happy patriarch, ſo peculiarly the friend of GOD! Nor was the caſe of thoſe widely different, to whom the promulgation of the goſpel was at firſt committed. Enjoined to be attentive only to the propagation of the chriſtian faith, divine protection was extended to them, in the moſt unqueſtionable interpoſitions; to ſupply the want to them alſo, of thoſe ſecular relations and

[n] Acts. c. 7. v. 3.

attentions,

attentions, from which by the precept of their maſter, and the functions of their ſacred office, they alſo, were ſecluded and removed. And yet even to theſe, prudence, and the [o] wiſdom of ſerpents were recommended by our Lord; and indeed became them in their ſituations: whether they were called to guide and rule the church, or to conduct themſelves amidſt unbelievers and perſecutors. Since the times of the apoſtles, the condition of the church has varied repeatedly; and of courſe, the obligations of chriſtians in this reſpect, have varied likewiſe; and yet, though this precept of our lord appears ſo plainly an abſolute law, to thoſe only who are placed in particular circumſtances; nevertheleſs it has been interpreted as if concluſive univerſally. But let [p] Simeon, or any other fanatic, ſtand upon his pillar; and if no miracle be interpoſed to ſatisfy his hunger, let him ſubmit himſelf, as others, "[q] to labour" in ſome honeſt vocation, that he may render himſelf uſeful to the community, and "have to give to "him that needeth."

Yet: though an abatement be made, from thoſe abſolute interpretations of the precept

[o] Matt. c. 10. v. 16.
[p] Stilites. Moſheim. Cent. 5.
[q] Epheſ. c. 4. v. 28.

of

of ſelf-denial, and the renunciation of the world: ſtill no ſmall ſhare of repentance is requiſite in every ſtation, previous to the acknowledgement of the truth of the goſpel: and in the progreſs to chriſtian perfection, an abſtraction continually increaſing will appear in thoſe, who deſire, with judgment, to advance from faith to faith. The nature of this repentance will be juſtly diſcerned, if conſidered as implying a ſeparation from every thing that would prevent the mind, from devoting itſelf to a ſtrict attendance on the commands of GOD.

Such are, in the firſt place, the infatuations of any ſenſual or worldly propenſity. Theſe are the [r] thorns that choke the ſeed of faith as ſoon as it begins to germinate; prejudices, which as ſoon as the evidence of chriſtianity has ſilenced oppoſition; interpoſe themſelves, to prevent the ingenuous confeſſions of the mind, to ſtop the ears againſt the truth, and deſtroy the native force, and effects of conviction. Next to theſe, but more ſophiſtical, are the infatuations of intellectual vanity; which refuſes inſtruction in the full confidence of its own ſufficiency: and laſtly, the ſtill more ſubtle

[r] Matt. c. 13. v. 22.

conceit

conceit of moral excellence; which rejects correction, as not adapted to a character already accomplished. To persons infatuated with these false notions, the gospel is preached in vain.

But in the present constitution of man, it is not to be expected, that he shall preserve himself clear, either in his principles of conduct, or his opinions, from error and false notion. The objects of sensual desire, those present attractions which continually and forcibly excite the appetites of men, leave them not at liberty to form, by a dispassionate judgment, the principles they adopt either of conduct or wisdom. Whatever may have been the pretences or delusions of philosophy, no self denial ever was so entire, as to exclude the world and the appetites of sense from a large share in fixing the character and the notions of the man. Nor these only, but his habits of thinking likewise, would usurp a share; and moreover those maxims of moral conduct, which he himself had devised, and to which he was addicted. All these, notwithstanding his utmost care, would give a bent to his inclination, and byas to his judgment, over which native discretion had but little influence. Hence the character of the single eye, or the mind untainted with false

falſe notion is no where to be found. The obedience of faith may ſubſiſt without it; provided the obſtinacy of falſe opinion be renounced. So then, the requiſite ſelf denial is reſtrained to the mortification of that pride, which gives to falſe opinion, and the wrong principles of perverted judgment, the the eſtabliſhment and ſecurity, of blind and ſettled prejudice.

The opinions which men had formed of the world, whether eſtabliſhed upon the authority of habitual preconception or ancient ſyſtem: the author of chriſtianity required of his diſciples to hold at a diſtance; and to deprive them of that ſway, with which they ruled the mind; an influence totally inconſiſtent with ſubmiſſion to the doctrines and the diſcipline of revealed religion. It was not required that all notions ſhould be renounced, all thoſe peculiar principles of conduct, which denominated the character of a man: for this had been impracticable. But ſuch a humility, mortification and reſignation of ſentiment and deſire were to be exhibited, as were neceſſary in thoſe, who were called to ſubmit themſelves to the guidance of a judgment, probably, very different from their own. Whoſoever applies to an advocate for counſel, or to a phyſician for advice, puts himſelf under the guidance

of the practitioner; giving up his own judgment, and following the direction he receives without waiting or expecting to be made to comprehend the reason of it. The disciple of Christ must follow prescription, in the same manner: and in order thereto must mortify all that obstinacy of sentiment or habit; in short, all that conceit which opposes private opinion to divine direction.

The repentance therefore required, is the mortification of prejudice, or the renunciation of conceit of every kind.

But it is a mistake, that many professors of christianity, from a very early period to the present times, have fallen into; that the regeneration wrought in the mind at baptism, whether divinely or by repentance, avails to the entire suppression of every sensual desire. The consequence of which tenet was, that every emotion of sensuality, after baptism; and also every erroneous opinion, have been conceived to be acts of apostasy, a desertion of that holy calling, into which the christian has been initiated, a falling back again into perdition, and crucifying of the son of GOD afresh. For this reason, in very early ages, men and princes, aware how impracticable it was to suppress every irregular emotion, to think and act rightly at all times, deferred baptism till the period

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of life; in hopes to pass, by a quick transition, from the point of regeneration to their final trial. Yet the very circumstance, that they found themselves, after the initiation of baptism, obnoxious to the [s] φρονημα σαρκος, or the infirmities of human frailty, should have taught them to form a juster idea of christian renovation; an opinion, which had they consulted the general tenor, instead of a few detached passages of the sacred scriptures, they would not have found it difficult to conceive.

There is no charm in the rite of baptism, that, at one instant, shall alter the nature and constitution of man; nor are his habits and sentiments to be rectified, by any single act of the mind, however well conceived. When we read therefore that men become, by the christian regeneration, "[t] dead to "sin;" that they "[u] have crucified the world "with the affections and lusts:" it is to be understood, that by the act of repentance, all that attachment to the world is renounced, which would make it the principle of conduct, and the ruling passion to pursue the gratification of the senses. Under the discipline of the gospel, another object directs the ruling passion: and of course as "[w] no

[s] Art. 9. [t] Rom. c. 6. v. 11. [u] Gal. c. 5. v. 24.
[w] Matt. c. 6. v. 24.

" man can ſerve two maſters, and be under the dominion of two rival principles, at the ſame time; the gratification of ſenſual and natural appetite, muſt be poſtponed to the object of the goſpel, now become the ruling * paſſion.

Beſides the pride of heart, the pride of reaſon alſo muſt be renounced, as prejudicial in a degree but little inferior. The opinions that men have adopted, from their habits of thinking, appear to them eſtabliſhed principles of truth: not barely conformable to right reaſon; but right reaſon itſelf: the ſtandard and criterion of truth propoſed to the mind. That men ſhall retain no opinions, or that all ſuch as they retain ſhall be accurate, is not in fact to be expected. But that men ſhall ſubdue the pride of reaſon, ſuch attachment to thoſe principles they have framed, as muſt render them prejudiced, and indiſpoſed to receive further information: this is highly reaſonable. Nor can any thing be more ſo, than that man, now become truly ſenſible, that in his mani-

* In this diſtinction ſeems to lie the true notion of ſins of infirmity. Thoſe incidental deviations from virtuous ſentiment, which, though they impede the work of reformation and incumber the mind, yet take it not entirely off from its courſe of mortification: theſe prove the regeneration truly imperfect; but argue no apoſtaſy.

fold

fold wants, his own moral ſtrength and the powers of his underſtanding, cannot afford him effectual aid; when he comes to revealed religion for the reſources of which he ſtands in need, ſhould be ready to exhibit that ſubmiſſion to preſcription, which he ſcruples not to pay, to the phyſician he conſults.

But the moſt ſubtle pride remains: that of virtue. Allied to the former, inaſmuch as this alſo is founded in reaſon: yet is it far leſs ſuſpected, becauſe it has more than the approbation of the principles of reaſon, being ſupported by the ſtrong recommendation of the moral principles, ſuch as the true, the becoming and the uſeful. But than this conceit hardly any other is more prejudicial. The goſpel is the religion of ſinners: the mind acquieſcent in its own worth appears to want it not. The word of God was written to convey inſtruction: but to the ſelf complacent mind already conſcious of its own dignity and wiſdom, no information ſeems requiſite. Shall the truly virtuous philoſopher ſubject thoſe principles to the arbitration of any new doctrine, by which he has already accompliſhed every moral purpoſe? Or to what end ſhould he ſubmit to preſcription, who by his own ſa-

gacity has attained to ſoundneſs of mind and integrity of manners? Were the complacency well founded, the arguments and concluſions would be juſt. But being not well founded, it is truly an infatuation, how plauſible ſoever; and deplorable is that infatuation, which precludes the uſe of thoſe remedies the caſe requires.

Are men then, to renounce their habits of virtue, in order to render themſelves qualified for the goſpel? Muſt they commit ſin deliberately, for the purpoſe that grace may abound? GOD forbid! Let the habits of virtue, like the principles of reaſon be retained; but let the vanity, the arrogance of moral wiſdom, the pride of virtue and the pride of reaſon be taught equally to think thus: that the wiſdom of man is, at beſt, but his opinion, his virtue but his habit; neither of them complete, or formed on principles of abſolute or perfect truth. Under this conviction, let the practical and ſpeculative philoſopher equally prepare themſelves, by the renunciation of ſelfconceit, to pay a juſt ſubmiſſion to preſcription, and bend their ears with equal reverence, to the dictates of their common inſtructor, redeemer, ſaviour.

When the pride of heart, the pride of reaſon,

reaſon, and the pride of virtue are thus renounced, the way is open to an entire reformation. The old man, to adopt the expreſſive language of St Paul, thus crucified, the work of regeneration may begin; and the new man may be created, formed under the plaſtick hand of chriſtian diſcipline.

But let it not be thought, that the work of reformation is performed at once, by one ſingle act of renunciation, or at any ſingle period. Though the convert have adopted the propereſt ſentiments, though he come to the font of baptiſm, with a mind, like the [y] infant, untainted with conceit; ſtill the work of renunciation is not finally accompliſhed. The world and the fleſh do not ſo eaſily looſe their influence, nor is the efficacy of chriſtian grace (as it is called) diſplayed, as our Lord exhibited the power of his word: when by one ſingle interpoſition, he caſt out evil ſpirits. The root of bitterneſs, the depravity remains, a wound deeply infixed in the heart: and occaſions will occur from time to time, to excite the latent ſparks and renew the taſk, as the neceſſity of mortification. Thus, the whole period of man's abode in this earthly taber-

[y] Mart. c. 18. v. 3.

bernacle

bernacle is appointed for trial and probation. The ſingle eye is no more to be obtained than the conſtitution without the ſeeds of latent malady. The influence of theſe defects will from time to time be perceived equally in both, to be obviated by occaſional remedies and applications. But here the reſemblance ceaſes: the difficulty of reſtoring bodily health, when attacked by conſtitutional maladies, increaſes with old age, till the tenement worn out with repeated ſhocks, can be repaired no longer. The difficulty of preſerving ſoundneſs of mind decreaſes, as the maladies which attack it are weakened by oppoſition and denial: ſo that the taſk, if diligently performed, becomes every day more eaſy; the attacks are more and more feeble, the danger leſs and leſs imminent: till at the evening of life, the chriſtian, exulting in aſſured hope, may ſay with the confidence of St Paul: "I have fought a "good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I "have kept the faith. Henceforth there is "laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, "which the Lord, the righteous judge, ſhall "give me in that day."

SER-

SERMON V.

GALAT. II. 20.

The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

FROM repentance let us proceed to consider the duty of faith, as of the virtue that is to mark the christian character: and in order that we may conceive rightly of the religion in which all our hopes concentre; let us take every precaution, that we fall not into low and narrow notions of that faith, so much extolled by St Paul as the quality in Abraham, which the Almighty rewarded with all the favours, by which that patriarch was distinguished.

The mind accustomed to consider the repentance required by the gospel, as the denial

nial and mortification of every conceit, that might create a prejudice againſt the word of GOD; is led, of courſe, to view the virtue of faith, as the peculiar virtue of revelation: as that duty which aroſe out of the new relation of man, that was produced when GOD was pleaſed to manifeſt his will, in precepts and intimations delivered at his command, and under atteſted divine authority. Nor is ſuch diſcernment an inconſiderable privilege. For it is certain, that in all moral diſquiſitions, the greateſt difficulty lies in the incompetency of words to convey preciſely the ſentiments of one man to another: becauſe, the ideas of moral virtues are combinations framed arbitrarily in the mind; and, of courſe, variouſly compoſed by different men: from whence it ariſes, that the words, being uniform, which are uſed to ſignify them, by no means expreſs each man's peculiar idea; but become, in ſuch application, indefinite and equivocal. It is indeed generally found, where moral queſtions are made the ſubjects of controverſy, that a miſunderſtanding occaſions the diſpute; becauſe the hearer and the ſpeaker make uſe of terms in common, to which they have not affixed the ſame preciſe meaning. This difficulty, without queſtion, attended the promulgation of the

the goſpel. As its teachers (unleſs they had formed a language peculiar to themſelves) were obliged to expreſs chriſtian virtues by thoſe terms, which in common uſe came the neareſt in ſignification; and as they ſpake to perſons who had already framed ideas, to which they were accuſtomed to apply theſe terms: unleſs the teacher accurately defined his meaning according to the principles of his own ſyſtem; or unleſs his hearers were diligent to collect his ſenſe from the general tenor of his doctrine, they could have no clear or juſt perception of the principles or the precepts he inculcated. By not attending to this circumſtance, the following ill conſequence has ariſen in the diſcuſſion of chriſtian doctrine: that undiſcerning teachers, drawing their inferences from the words of the ſacred writers, though they put an interpretation upon them, foreign, perhaps not conſiſtent with the ſentiments of the apoſtle; have perpetually found themſelves involved in perplexing queſtions, of which they could not diſcover any ſolution. Nor indeed were ſuch difficulties to be ſolved by any other method, than by reforming entirely the notions entertained of the apoſtolic doctrine, by collating the paſſage with other parts of ſcrip-

ſcripture, [a] comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual; and thus copying the real ſentiments of the teacher, and taking pains to tranſcribe his ſpirit and his terms together. Indeed there is no doubt to be made, but that a great number of the queſtions, controverſies and errors about chriſtian doctrine, have ariſen from miſconception or falſe interpretation of the terms, uſed by the ſacred writers. With this in view, let us inquire what quality or diſpoſition was that faith in Abraham, which was [b] imputed to him for righteouſneſs?

The life of this patriarch is the moſt extraordinary of any recorded in the annals of the world. Commanded, by GOD, to remove himſelf from one country to another, he gave an inſtance of migration as ſingular, as his preſervation through life was miraculous. There are inſtances, in great abundance, of colonies, that by force of arms have eſtabliſhed themſelves in countries, after they had expelled, or elſe ſubdued the former inhabitants. There are alſo inſtances in hiſtory, where a [c] family having removed from one country to another, has eſtabliſhed itſelf in its new ſettlement, by forming alli-

[a] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 13. [b] Gen. c. 15. v. 6. [c] Tarquin

ances

ances there, as Lot did in Sodom. But, for an individual to quit the place of his father's kindred, his father's houſe, and his father's ſepulture; and to drive his flocks into a diſtant land, where he not only had no manner of eſtabliſhment, but alſo continually declined every overture towards alliance; was in the eyes of natural prudence, the moſt raſh and unaccountable procedure. Indeed it was manifeſtly to expoſe his perſon and his property to every inſult and depredation; and that, both with, and without the form of law: thus to ſojourn among a people, not included within the protection of their laws or the ſecurity of their government; not aſſociated with them, and without any viſible reſource for his preſervation. But the command of GOD was explicit; and the patriarch obeyed the voice, "[d] and went out, "not knowing whither he went."

The conduct of the ſame patriarch, when commanded to ſacrifice his ſon, was expreſſive of the ſame diſpoſition of mind at that time alſo. Though Iſaac was the appointed heir of all the promiſes that had been made to him, he ſcrupled not to obey the divine command, and lifted up the knife, with a

[d] Heb. c. 11. v. 8.

fixed

fixed reſolution to ſlay his only begotten ſon; of whom it was ſaid: [e] In Iſaac ſhall thy ſeed be called. In both theſe inſtances the quality that diſtinguiſhes the patriarch is obedience, or implicit ſubmiſſion to the word of GOD; according to the character given of him, when GOD repeated the promiſe to his ſon Iſaac: "[f] In thy ſeed ſhall all the "nations of the earth be bleſſed; becauſe "Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my "charge; my commandment, my ſtatutes "and my laws."

But the faith, of which it is recorded, that "[g] it was counted to him for righteouſ-"neſs," preſents itſelf in a form ſomewhat different. After the promiſe made to him, of reſt and eſtabliſhment in the land where he then ſojourned by the divine appointment; although he had no ſon, and was now of ſo advanced an age, that there appeared almoſt a natural improbability that he ſhould have iſſue; [h] it was declared to him by the word of the Lord, that his poſterity ſhould be numerous, as the ſtars of heaven. Confiding in the divine power and veracity, "[i] he "ſtaggered not at the promiſe," becauſe of this improbability; but "believed GOD,

[e] Heb. c. 11. v 17, 18. [f] Gen. c. 26. v. 5. [g] Gen. c. 15. v. 6. [h] Gen. c. 15. v. 5. [i] Rom. c. 4. v. 3.

"and

"and it was imputed to him for righteouſ-
"neſs." In this laſt inſtance, the patriarch's faith, was implicit belief of GOD, and truſt and affiance in the divine word and promiſes.

But let not any man, from the different appearance made by the quality in theſe inſtances of the faith of Abraham, be led haſtily to conclude that the true notion of the virtue is indefinite; or that it lies more in the one, than in the other interpretation. Rather let ſome general principle be ſought, incluſive and characteriſtic of them all.

The circumſtance, in the life of this patriarch, which renders it ſo ſingular, is this: that, detached from his family, and viſible connexions, he was called to act under immediate divine direction, and ſo fulfil the poſitive commands of GOD: whoſe purpoſes were, for the moſt part, myſterious to him, even while he contributed to accompliſh them. And thus his virtue conſiſted in paying an implicit attention to every various intimation of the divine will, and conforming himſelf to it, as ſuch.

The providence of GOD is in ſome repects to every man, the ſame indication of the divine will, as the word of GOD was to Abraham the father of the faithful. Since the ſupreme Creator impreſſed thoſe laws of order

order upon the material world, by which the whole ſyſtem is maintained: each body ſubſiſting in its place, or revolving in the orbit aſſigned to it, is ſubſervient to the will of him that formed it. In like manner, ſince the ſame ſupreme Being has impreſſed eternal rules of right and wrong on his rational and reflecting creatures; he has thereby pointed out the orbit to each of them, in which the governor of the univerſe has deſigned that he ſhould move, obedient to divine appointment: and ſo likewiſe, the allotment of each perſon into his particular ſtation, marked by his qualifications, and the circumſtances of good or bad fortune (as they are called) that attend him, determine what part the great manager has aſſigned him to perform, on the theatre of the world. To bear a mind conformable to the will of GOD, howſoever thus indicated, is by ethic writers denominated obedience in general: branched out into active and paſſive obedience, with the attendant qualities on each; acquieſcence and ſubmiſſion, truſt, patience nd reſignation. [k] The Stoic philoſophers have drawn many admirable precepts from the dominion and providence of GOD; and

[k] See Bp Wilkins on nat. rel. B. 1. c. 16, 17. and the paſſages quoted there.

moreover,

moreover, were the terms, they make uſe of, put into the mouth of a perſon who acted under the guidance of revelation, they would almoſt without any variation, expreſs the virtue of faith entirely. For, the diſpenſations of providence being to the man who is governed by the moral impreſſions of piety, indications of the divine will; they are the very ſame as the word of GOD (but with far greater evidence) to the man, whom GOD is pleaſed to direct by the certain light of his will revealed. And, in conſequence, the ſame reſignation, and ſubjection of the inclinations and underſtanding, are unqueſtionably due to theſe manifeſt indications of the divine will; upon the ſame moral principles, as they are due to the diſpenſations of natural providence.

From this analogy, the declaration of our Lord will appear in a ſtriking point of view: "[1] If any man will do his will, he ſhall "know of the doctrine whether it be of "GOD, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf." For ſince the analogy runs quite throughout: between the diſpenſations of providence, and the word of GOD, on the one ſide, as the objects; and moral obedience or religious

[1] Jo. c 7. v 17.

deference, and faith as the reſpective qualities, on the other: hence the man, accuſtomed to demean himſelf obediently, will find in him a diſpoſition to act faithfully, when made the object of a revealed diſpenſation. And moreover though the queſtion itſelf, whether God have made a revelation, be of a fact that is to be proved by reaſonable evidence; yet it will be treated in a very different manner by the perſon habitually under the influence of pious obedience, and one accuſtomed "to live (according to the ex-"preſſion of St Paul [m]) without God in the "world." For the man of piety will not think himſelf at liberty to refuſe his attention to the queſtion; and in his examination of the evidence, he will take eſpecial care, that he pronounce not raſhly, what God has or has not wrought by ſo ſpecial an interpoſition, as a revelation. And further than this, when once it is become evident to him, that God has thought fit to make a declaration of his will; it will appear on the moral principles of piety incumbent on him, as a perſon to whom the revelation is addreſſed, to pay an implicit deference and obedience to every part of ſuch a diſpenſation.

[m] Epheſ. c. 2. v. 12.

This

This reſemblance and analogy therefore ſeem plainly to point out a definition of faith, as deference to the word of GOD: or the following deſcription of religious obedience will bear to be transferred entirely to the duty of faith, under a revealed diſpenſation. "The habit of obedience" (ſays a [n] writer on the ſubject of natural religion) "may be "deſcribed to conſiſt in ſuch a ſubmiſſive "frame of ſpirit, whereby a man doth al-"ways devote and reſign himſelf unto the "diſpoſal of his maker, being ready in every "condition, to do or ſuffer that, which he "apprehends to be moſt reaſonable and ac-"ceptable, and whereby he may beſt ex-"preſs his love and ſubjection." The quality of faith, like that of obedience, varies in appearance, according to the different tenor of the revelation that is the object of it. Thus, when the Almighty deigns, by ſuch an interpoſition, to deliver his commands, whether they be moral or poſitive ſtatutes, faith will be expreſſed by implicit ſubmiſſion, and dutiful conformity to the divine precepts; and this, in the language of St Paul [o], is called the obedience of faith. In like manner, if he ſhould reveal truths,

[n] Bp Wilkins on nat. rel. B. 1. c. 16. [o] Rom. c. 16. v. 26.

or deliver doctrines to be received, whether the doctrines be ſpeculative principles, promiſes or denunciations; even though they be ever ſo myſterious in their tenor and accompliſhment, they will be embraced with implicit credit and the moſt aſſured aſſent; and this is to "[p] believe God," as the ſame apoſtle emphatically expreſſes himſelf. Such a deſcription of the virtue of faith, which will bear to be applied to revelations of every tenor, is alone comprehenſive of every expreſſion by which the diſpoſition of the faithful may be teſtified; and ſuch alone will be found ſatisfactory, when the different ſenſes in which the term is uſed by the inſpired writers are compared with it; and ſtill more, when compared with the various inſtances of the virtue in Abraham, and the numerous examples beſides, recorded. From whence this concluſion follows: that faith is not juſtly defined, either by obſervance of the word of God; or belief of God: in ſhort, that it is not limited to either, but includes the whole together.

Such is the quality, that denominated the diſpoſition of Abraham, and all the heroes of faith before the goſpel; and the ſame virtue is alſo the characteriſtic of the chriſtian.

[p] Rom. c. 4. v. 3.

In

In contemplating the ſubject of patriarchal faith, it would be unpardonable to overlook the laſt actions of Jacobs life, as they are repreſented by the writer to the Hebrews. For theſe are beautifully deſcriptive of the ſame principle of deference to the word of GOD. This venerable patriarch had ſpent his life, as a pilgrim, in Canaan, obedient to divine appointment: excepting, that once before upon a former occaſion, and now at the cloſe of his life he was driven thence by a famine in ſearch of a ſubſiſtence. Yet, it is [q] remarked of him, in this removal, that he did not deſert his appointed ſtation, till he had received expreſſly the divine approbation. Though he was now ſettled by the gratitude of Pharaoh and the care of Joſeph in the richeſt province of Egypt, his heart was ſtill in Canaan; nor could the plenty of Goſhen on the one hand; nor the danger of a ſtate of pilgrimage, on the other, induce him to forget that land of inheritance, which had been bequeathed to him by the Patriarchs, his fathers, and confirmed to him by repeated revelation. Under this perſuaſion he bound his ſons, by an oath, to depoſit his remains in that field of Ephron,

[q] Gen. c. 46. v. 3.

which Abraham had purchaſed to be, as it were, a ſeizen of the whole poſſeſſion; and having obtained aſſurance in this reſpect, "[r] worſhipped leaning on the top of his ſtaff," declaring by this act, in a moſt deſcriptive manner, that he was ſtill in his heart a pilgrim, and a ſojourner in Canaan.

From patriarchal faith the tranſition is eaſy to the faith required by Jeſus Chriſt, and the firſt miniſters of his word. The whole evangelical hiſtories repreſent in every part, that our [s] Lord demanded of thoſe who came to him for relief, a confeſſion of his divine miſſion; or of his power to afford them the relief they deſired, which was equivalent. Indeed the act of making the petition to him, implied almoſt as much as the confeſſion. This confeſſion expreſſed an aſſent of the mind to the truth, that Jeſus was the ſon of GOD, the Meſſiah, in the ſenſe in which that divine perſon had been promiſed and foretold. The aſſent was rationally founded upon the teſtimony that GOD had borne to this truth: upon the mighty works done by our Lord, and the plain completion of the ſcripture prophecies in his perſon. But the aſſent did by no

[r] Heb. c. 11. v. 21. [s] Matt. c. 9. v. 28.

means

means ſtop at confeſſion; nor did faith reſt in ſuch a bare aſſent of the mind to theſe great leading truths. When the prophet Jeremiah pronounced againſt Judah the judgments of GOD, even the moſt obſtinate of that rebellious people could not but know, after the events predicted had taken place, by the captivity of the nation; that, in the perſon of Jeremiah, there had been, moſt aſſuredly, a prophet amongſt them. But what then? The men of Nineveh, when GOD in mercy ſent his prophet Jonah to them, were placed in the ſame circumſtances with this highly favoured people. But how widely different their conduct? The men of Nineveh acknowledged the voice of GOD, in a manner effectual to their deliverance, when, corrected by the prophetic warning, "they repented at the preaching of Jonah." Such was their faith; but will the conſtrained acknowledgement given by alienated Judah to the prophet, denominate that rebellious people faithful, notwithſtanding they refuſed to obey the voice of GOD, and preſumptuouſly fled to Egypt for refuge, rather than ſerve the king of Babylon, under the protection of the GOD of Iſrael? If theſe indeed were faithful, then was Pharaoh alſo faithful, and ſo are thoſe rebellious ſpirits, who

[t] who tremble at the divine wrath while they oppoſe the will of Heaven.

But yet if there were no true faith in this aſſent, or rather in the aſſent which is expreſſed by confeſſion, why did it avail in the times of the apoſtles to the admiſſion of believers into the church, and to the participation of the chriſtian privileges? The fact cannot be controverted. This aſſent of the mind is unqueſtionably an act of true faith. If it were not ſo, the doctrines of revelation, or the "truths made known to us of GOD" would not be objects of our faith. For an aſſent of the mind to them is the only teſtimony of obedience to the word of GOD; that can be ſhown towards theſe manifeſtations. "Abraham believed GOD and it "was counted to him for righteouſneſs;" juſt ſo under the goſpel, "[w] with the heart "man believeth unto righteouſneſs, and with "the mouth confeſſion is made unto ſalva-"tion." But as yet the chriſtian has not advanced one ſtep beyond the font of baptiſm. Having now brought the convert to Chriſt, he is made partaker of the redemption; his faith in the ſon of GOD, expreſſed by confeſſion, is imputed to him for righ-

[t] James. c. 2. v. 19. [u] Whitby's Pref. to Ep. to the Gal. [w] Rom. c. 10. v. 10.

teouſneſs;

teouſneſs; and like Abraham he is brought nigh to GOD, and becomes an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven. But, as he is a diſciple of Chriſt, he is not, in the leaſt, exempted from obligation, by virtue of that character. When GOD commanded Abraham to leave his country, and to ſacrifice his ſon; in both theſe manifeſtations, his aſſent to the word of GOD, was expreſſed by obedience, nor could it be expreſſed otherwiſe: by an obedience deſcriptive of ſuch an entire conformity, that neither the ſuggeſtions of worldly prudence, no nor yet the dictates even of parental tenderneſs were ſuffered to ſtand in competition with the will of GOD. Nor is the caſe otherwiſe with the diſciple of Chriſt. "[x] He that loveth "father or mother ſon or daughter, or even "his own life more than his divine maſter, "is not worthy of him:" nay he "cannot "be his diſciple." [y] And "what is the love "of GOD but to keep his commandments?" The reſemblance between the diſpenſation of which Abraham was, and this whereof chriſtians are the objects fully eſtabliſhes what is here aſſerted. For in the goſpel there are precepts and ordinances ſet forth

[x] Matt. c. 10. v. 37. [y] 1 Jo. c. 5. v. 3.

to

to be obſerved, diſpoſitions and religious qualities to be cultivated. The firſt diſciples, according to the particular exigencies of the chriſtian religion in thoſe times, were like the patriarch commanded to quit every earthly tie, and ſetting even their lives upon the hazard, to proſecute the purpoſes of GOD, the propagation of the goſpel, the advancement of the kingdom of the Meſſiah. The ſame is true, though in a ſenſe a little more reſtrained, of the diſciples of Chriſt in every age. They are as merchants, bartering the eaſe of voluptuouſneſs, the delights of ſenſe, whatſoever the world produces that excites deſire, nay every natural appetite beſides, if need require it, for the reſt, for the treaſure, for the precious gems, which the goſpel holds forth as its rewards. As ſtrangers and pilgrims, they are ſojourning in the viſible kingdom of GOD, as an earthly Canaan, in the hope of an inheritance and eternal reſt in the land of promiſe. Was Abraham enjoined to leave his country and his kindred? The chriſtian "[z] muſt crucify "the old man entirely; [a] to him old things "are paſt away, and behold all things are "become new." Was Abraham commanded

[z] Rom. c. 6. v. 6. [a] 2 Cor. c. 5. v. 17.

to

to ſacrifice his beloved ſon? The ſubjection of each darling paſſion, deſcribed by "[b] cutting off the hand and plucking out the eye "that gives offence," is, by the unequivocal command of Chriſt, incumbent on his diſciple. Had the patriarch, in any period of his life, taken an opportunity of "[c] returning "to the country from whence he had re-"moved," he had apoſtatized from his faith: juſt ſo, if the diſciple of Chriſt, having renounced the world "[d] fall back again and be "intangled therein; his latter end is worſe "than the beginning."

We find, in the beſt writers on the ſubject of faith, definitions widely different: but this difference plainly ariſes from the different light, in which they view the goſpel diſpenſation.

Bp Pearſon[e] defines faith to be "the be-"lief of things credible," as credible. But in this definition, he has in view the articles of chriſtian confeſſion, of which he is writing an expoſition. The objects of faith therefore which he has in contemplation, are doctrinal truths: and without queſtion, faith with reſpect to doctrinal truths, is belief upon the teſtimony of GOD. His defi-

[e] Heb c. 11. v. 15. [d] 2 Pet. c. 2. v. 20. [e] Expoſition of the Creed.

nition

nition therefore is by no means inaccurate, provided it be not considered as a definition of christian faith in general; but of that act of faith, by which assent is given to the truths made known to us of GOD.

This definition of faith did not satisfy Bp Sherlock [f]. Faith," says he, " which is the " principle of the gospel, respects the pro- " mises and declarations of the gospel, and " includes a sure trust and reliance on him " for the performance." In another place [g] he speaks his sentiments more explicitly. " The faith that justifies, signifies trust and " reliance on GOD, with confident hope and " expectation of his promises." But (with all due deference to a judgment so superior) faith is certainly limited too much, in this definition also. The gospel is here considered not as a revelation of doctrinal or professional truth, but as a religion; and yet incompletely as such. For the precepts, the declarations, the ordinances of GOD produce in the faithful, not trust and reliance, but obedience. [h] It is true the rewards are the motives and incentives to obedience, and the promises demand trust and reliance as the proper expressions of faith in the word of

[f] Vol. I. Disc. 14. p. 368. 7°. [g] Vol. II. Disc. 3. p. 52. [h] Sherlock, Vol. I. Disc. 14.

GOD.

GOD. Theſe promiſes therefore are the means by which the goſpel produces its end; but not the end itſelf, for that is "[1] to re- "deem us from all iniquity, and purify unto "GOD a peculiar people, zealous of good "works." While the means therefore receive their due ſhare of man's religious attention, and while they direct his hopes, his wiſhes and expectations; let not the end be overlooked; but let the precepts meet with their due attention alſo, and influence his obedience, his ſubmiſſion, and conformity.

I conclude therefore that neither of theſe definitions expreſſes the complete idea of chriſtian faith, of which nevertheleſs they repreſent truly, genuine acts: while it requires terms more abſtract to define faith in general. And I hope I may venture to affirm of this chriſtian quality, that it is deference to the word of GOD. That, what pious obedience, paſſive obedience is, in morals, to the will of GOD; the ſame is faith to his word. An equal deference to all the divine manifeſtations, his doctrines, his precepts and his promiſes.

From this repreſentation, faith, though ſo appropriated to revealed religion, appears

[1] Tit. c. 2. v. 13, 14.

to

to be truly a moral quality, as much as reſignation and ſubmiſſion to the diſpenſations of providence are moral qualities. They all reſult alike from the impreſſions of piety; from whence this maxim of Pythagoras and the Stoics was taken. Ἕπεσθαι θεῷ [k].

The ſame arguments that prove faith to be a moral virtue, prove it alſo to be a reaſonable ſervice. For although a part of its duty conſiſts in bending the collected principles of reaſon to an acquieſcence in the doctrines revealed; yet is is highly reaſonable that ſuch acquieſcence in preſcription ſhould be ſhown towards perfect truth and perfect wiſdom. Eſpecially where a man comes to be taught of GOD: for this quality is no other than what the maſters in every ſcience require of thoſe diſciples, who apply to them for their inſtruction.

From theſe remarks on the nature of faith in general, it appears that faith is the ſole principle of chriſtian knowledge and chriſtian virtue. In the account [l] of the temptation of our ſaviour, it is obſervable, that when the ſeducer would have drawn him into impatience under the divine diſpenſations, into apoſtaſy from GOD, and preſump-

[k] Seneca de Vitâ beatâ. Boethius de Conſol. Philo. de Migra. Abrahæ. [l] Matt. c. 4.

tion;

tion; he took all the weapons of his defence from the ſcriptures: oppoſing to the temptation, not his own reaſons, but the written precepts of GOD's law; and thus with the [m] ſhield of faith, quenching the fiery darts of the wicked. Under the gentile economy it was required of every man, that he ſhould be piouſly obſervant of the will of GOD, ſearching after it in every natural intimation, in the laws of reaſon and conſcience; and conforming himſelf to every religious precept. In no age of the world has the great Creator [n] left himſelf without witneſs; making, in his viſible creation, a very intelligible revelation of his power and godhead; and leaving, in the diſcernment of good and evil, an indelible impreſſion of his will. In the apocryphal book of wiſdom it is obſerved [o]; that they, who transferred to the creature the homage due to the Creator, were worthy of puniſhment for this reaſon, that ſeeing the things that are made, they did not form more juſt notions of the maker of them. For when the governor of the univerſe gave to man theſe moral informations, he laid an obligation on him to make a right uſe of them to his improvement, and

[m] Eph. c. 6. v. 16. [n] Rom. c. 1. v. 19. [o] Rom. c. 13.

left

left him without excuſe for thoſe deviations from natural or moral truth, into which he fell by neglecting to apply theſe talents, through ſloth or wilful perverſneſs. Juſt ſo, when the Almighty has made to any of his creatures, in a revelation, a more explicit manifeſtation of his will: he has intruſted them, by ſo doing, with additional advantages of improvement, as with a larger number of talents; and will require of them a greater proficiency, both in the knowledge and performance of his will. In the ſame manner therefore as moral piety obliges man to inquire after the commands of GOD, howſoever intimated, and to continue in them; ſo faith obliges thoſe to whom a revelation has been made, to pay a religious attention to the word of GOD, and conform their underſtandings, their deſires, their conduct, according to the manifeſtations, the promiſes, the precepts contained in it.

Faith therefore includes the whole of the chriſtian manifeſtations as its comprehenſive object: not that in the notion of the faith of Jeſus Chriſt, by which the chriſtian conducts himſelf, ſuch perfection of moral ſentiment has any place, as ſuits not with the infirmity of human frailty. A ſubmiſſion to preſcription would not be required of a moral agent, who

who poſſeſſed a ſoundneſs of mind; and it is on account of an inherent perverſeneſs of will in him, and infatuation of underſtanding, that it is made the duty of the redeemed, to regulate himſelf by the judgment of another, not his own. To ſuch a character of conformity, the expreſſion of our Saviour agrees: "[p] If ye continue in my word, then are ye my diſciples indeed." And in that diſcourſe, wherein he repreſents himſelf under the image of a vine[q], he ſpeaks the ſame language moſt explicitly. "As the branch "cannot bear fruit of itſelf except it abide "in the vine; no more can ye, except ye "abide in me." To this truth, all the ſacred writers give their teſtimony. To lead a life of faith, is to walk in the light, and to be united to Chriſt: and thus, as our Lord [r] dwells in the believer by his ſanctifying ſpirit; the believer[s] dwells in GOD by faith. Nor is the converſe of the propoſition aſſerted leſs plainly by our Lord: "If a man "abide not in me, he is caſt out as a branch "and is withered". And according to St Paul[t]: a deſertion of the faith, is a departure from the living GOD through an evil heart

[p] Jo. c. 8. v. 31. [q] Jo. c. 15. v. 14. [r] 1 Jo. c. 4. v. 15, 16. [s] 1 Jo. c. 2. v. 5, 6. [t] Heb. c. 3. v. 12.

of unbelief. Nay, he affirms the ſame truth directly, in that paſſage; where, ſpeaking of the aſſurance of faith, or the perſuaſion of mind upon chriſtian principles, [u]he makes uſe of this ſtrong expreſſion [w]: "whatſoever "is not of faith is ſin."

[u] Rom. c. 14. v. 14. [w] Rom. c. 14. v. 23.

SER-

SERMON VI.

2 PET. III. 18.

Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.

THE religion of the goſpel conſiſts entirely in the duty of faith, a virtue thus peculiar to revelation. But it would be as vain to endeavour to delineate faith completely, as to attempt to ſketch out a perfect ſyſtem of moral obligation: for the virtuous qualities that ſpring from faith, as thoſe which reaſon recommends, are too numerous for the purpoſe; through the various tenor of the doctrines of GOD, and the difference of ſtations, in which our great maſter has allotted to each of his ſervants ſeverally, to paſs his days of pilgrimage and probation. But, in order that the chriſtian's obligations

may be diſcerned with greater accuracy, though ſyſtems will ever fail to expreſs them perfectly, it ſeems adviſeable to take a ſeparate view of its appearances, as a profeſſional and as a practical virtue.

Faith, the quality [a] required of every man who wiſhes to obtain the privileges of the chriſtian covenant, is to be defined in general: deference to the word of GOD. A deference that implies in its deſcription, an unfeigned aſſent to revealed doctrines: an implicit belief and truſt in the word of GOD: and an abſolute conformity to the precepts delivered under a divine commiſſion. "[b] Whoever define faith otherwiſe, if men of Judgment, differ rather in words than ſentiment;" while ſome place that conformity among the neceſſary conſequences, which others take into the eſſential properties of the virtue.

The firſt act of chriſtian faith is an aſſent of the mind to Chriſt, as the ſaviour of the world. St Paul ſays: "without faith it is "not poſſible to pleaſe GOD. For he that "cometh to GOD, muſt believe that he is; "and that he is the rewarder of them that "diligently ſeek him." [c] Here, the faith expreſſed by aſſent is declared to be requiſite,

[a] Acts. c. 16. v. 31. [b] Whitby's Pref. to Galat. concluſion. [c] Bp Sherlock, Vol. I. S. 14. p. 369.

as

as a part of all religion whatſoever. The ſame is alſo true of the goſpel. Without faith it is impoſſible to enter into the chriſtian covenant. For he that cometh to Chriſt for ſalvation muſt believe, as well his deſignation to fill the divine character of the Meſſiah, as his power to effect his deliverance and redemption. Upon teſtification of ſuch aſſent of the mind, an entrance[d] is given to the chriſtian covenant. Such faith is counted for righteouſneſs: And through the mediation of the redeemer they who before were enemies to GOD by wicked works, are reconciled by his death; are freely juſtified[e] by the blotting out of all their former tranſgreſſions; are admitted into the kingdom of Chriſt, and the condition of diſciples of that divine teacher, who is emphatically ſtiled the word incarnate.

But though this act of faith be an aſſent founded upon rational evidence; yet a diſpoſition of mind to embrace whatever may appear to be the will of GOD, is neceſſary to enable men to be impartial judges of the evidence: and, of courſe, to produce ſuch a hearty and true confeſſion. "[f] For though

[d] Rom. c. 3. v. 22. Rom. c. 4. v. 24. [e] Whitby's Pref. to Galat. Juſtification. [f] Bp Sherlock, Vol. II. p. 49.

"such perſuaſion of mind may be attained "by the application of natural reaſon and "knowledge, yet the exerciſe of reaſon and "knowledge depends upon the will and in-"clination." And, by conſequence, the goſpel, though atteſted by all the demonſtration of the ſpirit, "[g] will be effectually hid-"den from thoſe, in whom the GOD of this "world hath blinded their minds, that the "light of the glorious goſpel of Chriſt, "who is the image of GOD, might not "ſhine unto them."

For this reaſon, our divine maſter, in all thoſe diſcourſes in which he inculcated the nature and tendency of his diſpenſation, involved his meaning in the [h] obſcurity of parables: [i] to the intent, that they, who were too much infatuated to hear his word with attention, might not have any knowledge of his doctrine. And ſo it was, that of the great multitudes that heard him, in very many it anſwered the deſcription of the ſeed that fell by the way: "and [k] the word ſpo-"ken did not profit them: not being mixed "with faith in them that heard it." And much is it to be feared that of thoſe alſo, who now, by name, profeſs themſelves fol-

[g] 2 Cor. c. 4. v. 3. [h] Jortin on parables, Vol II. Serm. [i] Luke. c. 8. v. 10. [k] Heb. c. 4. v. 2.

lowers

lowers of Chriſt, there are very many, who likewiſe are of the ſame deſcription of perſons that ſeeing, ſee not, and hearing the word, take no pains to underſtand it, and therefore hear it not, to any purpoſe of information. And ſo, they remain entirely ignorant, and are incapable during their whole lives, of making a proper confeſſion of faith in Chriſt.

Be it noted therefore, that all faith, even that aſſent of the mind which is neceſſary to chriſtian confeſſion, muſt begin from repentance. The diſpoſition of the believer muſt derive its birth from the aſhes, from the mortification of the conceit of all former opinions. When a man is deeply ſenſible of his depravity and weakneſs: that his natural depravity makes both an atonement and reformation neceſſary to reconcile him to God, and that he is by no means able to effect either by himſelf: that in conſequence of this depravity, the powers and ſentiments of his mind and underſtanding are fallen into a ſtate of weakneſs and infatuation; and that no exertions of his own mere ſtrength will diſpel the [1] miſt and darkneſs that cover him: then may he be diſpoſed to accept of

[1] Matt. c. 6.

the

the divine aid, held out to him by the chriſtian diſpenſation; and to put himſelf with ſubmiſſion of will and underſtanding, under the direction of the chriſtian preceptor. So juſt is that compariſon[m] of the goſpel to a touchſtone; by which the experiment may be made, what minds are capable of remedy.

Such are the perſons who acknowledge, and apply to our Saviour as a redeemer, and a teacher ſent from GOD: and then conform themſelves to the conſequences, that rationally follow ſuch an acknowledgement.

But of this faith, which lies in aſſent of the mind, there are degrees. It is one thing to acknowledge our Lord, in general terms, to be a teacher ſent from GOD: it is another, to make confeſſion of a true faith in his doctrines, according to knowledge. The firſt was done by every perſon who petitioned for relief from his bodily diſtempers; for the other, even the diſciples were not qualified during our ſaviour's miniſtry upon earth. The former is the faith of a convert; the latter is the faith of an eſtabliſhed chriſtian, the knowledge of a proficient. The remark of Cicero[n], that in the infancy of the mind,

[m] Grotius. [n] Serm. I. p. 11.

the

the moſt general and fundamental principles of rational conduct exiſt there in a confuſed and undefined manner, is juſtly to be applied to the preſent ſubject alſo. In this reſpect there is a cloſe reſemblance between rational and chriſtian principle. In the infancy of the ſpiritual mind, faith is profeſſed; but without a clear conception of the doctrines that make up the confeſſion, their tendency, or the profeſſional and practical concluſions that reſult from them. Such clear conception is not produced without an attentive hearing and conſideration of the word, and an application to it as diligent, as to the rules of any art of which men are deſirous to become maſters. For this reaſon, our Lord exhorted his diſciples to take heed "[o] how they heard;" repreſenting the word delivered to them, as a depoſit intruſted to their management; of which, and the improvement they ſhould make of it, he himſelf would one day take account.

When the endowments of man are conſidered, his mental as well as his animal qualifications, we are rationally led to expect, in every diſpenſation calculated for the uſe of ſuch a creature, truths to exerciſe and

[o] Luke, c. 8. v. 18.

inform

inform his underſtanding, as well as precepts to regulate and control his animal faculties. The following precept of St Paul[p], among others, ſhows that the chriſtian's character is not juſtly conſtituted without a juſtneſs of profeſſional as well as practical principle: "be ye not unwiſe, but underſtanding what "the will of the Lord is." And moreover there can be no doubt, but that a diligent application to the word of God, is required of all thoſe, to whom God has given leiſure and abilities, the qualifications neceſſary for ſuch employment: that ſo they may make a ſuitable proficiency in the knowledge of the myſteries of the kingdom of God, and advance to the more abſtruſe doctrines of chriſtianity.

Ariſtotle[q] has ſeparated wiſdom from prudence, defining the one to be the knowledge of many, and thoſe recondite truths; the other to be a quality, which applies itſelf to thoſe ſubjects alone, that are plainly uſeful in life. But Cicero in his offices arranges the inveſtigation of truth without any ſuch diſtinction under the head of prudence; and makes the improvement of knowledge, in general, a branch of thoſe duties, that fall

[p] Epheſ. c. 5. v. 17. [q] Ethics.

under

under the idea of prudential ſelf-government. Yet Cicero's notion of the truths to be inveſtigated, is in reality confined to truths uſeful; in ſhort, to truths that occur in courſe, to the writer of a book of offices. In the objects of faith, ſuch a diſtinction may be likewiſe made: but that there is an obligation on all men univerſally, to acquire a knowledge anſwerable to Ariſtotle's definition of wiſdom and prudence, is not true; for indeed it would not be practicable. Since the lot of a great part of our ſpecies is ſo entirely conſtituted in ſcenes of action and buſy life; they could neither qualify themſelves for, nor enter into long and abſtruſe ſpeculations, without deſerting their proper employments, and the important buſineſs of their ſtations. The truth is: the knowledge as the practice of the chriſtian exiſts in various degrees of proficiency: the doctrines of GOD lying more or leſs remotely, and requiring of courſe a greater or leſs degree of application to reach them. There is a majeſtic ſimplicity in the goſpel of Chriſt, by which it affords inſtruction to perſons of all degrees of mental improvement, provided they devoutly ſtudy to underſtand his will; and yet this ſimple doctrine furniſhes ſubjects to exerciſe the moſt cultivated underſtanding

ſtanding with advantage, while wiſdom is purſued with diſcretion. "[r] Wherefore who-
"ſoever ſo repreſents the chriſtian religion,
"as to make it a learned an ingenious thing
"to be a believer, forms a mean and un-
"worthy notion of that grace, which was
"revealed for the benefit of men of every
"rank in life." Yet further, ſince it is confeſſedly ſo obvious that Ariſtotle's diſtinction, when accommodated to a chriſtian proficiency, between wiſdom (or the ſemblance of it) and prudence, is not more juſt in reaſon, than diſcernible in real character, in which we obſerve practice often creep ſo deſpicably, where theory ſoars ſo high: it is plauſibly ſaid of chriſtian knowledge; that the reſearches of the moſt exquiſite ſubtlety are of no value, unleſs they conduce to actual improvement. Be it ſo: but on the other hand where virtue is not aſſociated with knowledge, and founded in principle, it will ſuffer the fate of the ſeed in ſtony[s] places; endure but for a while, and for want of root, wither under the ſcorching beams of trial or perſecution.

The ſcience of the true chriſtian philoſopher is contained entirely in the holy ſcrip-

[r] Jortin. [s] Matt. c. 13.

tures,

tures, which convey to us the ſayings of our heavenly maſter, and the writings of thoſe inſpired teachers, to whom he committed the miniſtration of his word. In theſe ſacred books, the moſt intereſting, but myſterious truths are manifeſted; which are impreſſed upon the mind of the diſciple, as the neceſſary articles of his confeſſion. Theſe manifeſtations are objects of chriſtian knowledge, of which no perſon can ſafely be neglectful. The myſterious doctrine that our redemption is purchaſed by the blood of the great chriſtian ſacrifice; and thoſe promiſes that animate the hope which is the helmet of the chriſtian ſoldier; and moreover, what other doctrine ſoever is plainly inculcated there, as an article of profeſſional faith; of theſe, the ſtrongeſt and moſt lively impreſſions are evidently neceſſary: for had they not been neceſſary, the doctrines would not have been delivered to us, to be received. Or taking up the argument on other grounds; for want of information and proficiency of knowledge in theſe peculiar doctrines of the author of our ſalvation; how weak and languid have men been found in principle, unſound in profeſſion, unſettled in hope, and inanimate in diſcharging the functions of piety, charity and ſobriety?

Moreover,

Moreover, as the precepts of our divine maſter are by no means delivered by him, or compriſed by any inſpired teacher in a ſyſtem, it is not directly obvious in what manner thoſe qualities or ſentiments ſhould be conſtituted, which enter into the true chriſtian character. This is to be learned from long and diligent contemplation of the whole canon of the ſcriptures, the only foundation of chriſtian doctrine. But when the caution of St Paul [t] is obſerved: "let every man "take heed how he buildeth thereupon," it will appear to be an important concern of the teacher of the word, to obtain a refined and exact perception of the truths intruſted to his miniſtration: that, in his diſcourſes, he may inculcate the precepts of chriſtianity, in their genuine ſpirit of refinement and excellence. For what errors have prevailed with reſpect to the doctrines of Chriſt, in any age; that did not produce ill conſequences in the church infected with them? From whence has that ſuperſtition ariſen, whence fanatiſm, whence enthuſiaſm, whence the uncharitable ſpirit of perſecution which have ſeverally deformed the chriſtian profeſſion; but from erroneous interpretation of

[t] 1 Cor. c. 3. v. 11.

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the chriſtian manifeſtations? And may it not be ſaid further: whence have irreſolute men received the moſt dangerous prejudices againſt the doctrine and the diſcipline of the goſpel? Whence have infidels and heretics found the moſt pernicious weapons which they have wielded againſt the faith? Whence, the objects of the moſt poignant ſatire, the keeneſt ridicule, and the ſharpeſt invective; but in the perverſions of chriſtian doctrine? Leave therefore, to thoſe mountebanks of licentious times, the wood, hay, ſtubble diſcourſes of men who talk at random; and let them utter the indigeſted effuſions of an unreflecting mind, and unreſtrained imagination; and let them look to the conſequences of ſuch preſumption: but let nothing be heard from the chair of the regular divine, other than the judicious ſentiments of an informed mind, the fruits of painful ſtudy and application.

There are various difficulties and obſtructions, that occur to the ſtudent in ſpiritual things, which call for no inconſiderable qualifications to remove them, and enable him to judge of doctrine with diſcretion. All allegorical writings as the diſcourſes of our Saviour are, for the moſt part; though intelligible enough to perſons converſant in his doctrine,

doctrine, are attended with the danger, leſt concluſions be drawn from them, beyond, or beſides thoſe, which were in the ſentiments of the teacher himſelf. But all our Saviour's diſcourſes are not equally plain and explicit. There were many truths in his goſpel, of which not even the diſciples at firſt, much leſs the mixed multitude of followers, were qualified to become advantageous hearers. Theſe truths he delivered in ſuch a manner, that lying concealed, they might not offend minds too much prepoſſeſſed: but that the attentive hearer, who diligently and faithfully ſtudied his word, might perceive them in the courſe of his application; and find his improvement proportionably advanced.

If theſe difficulties ariſe in the reading of our Saviour's own diſcourſes with critical and minute attention; far greater will be found when the ſtudent applies himſelf to ſtudy and underſtand the epiſtolary writings of the firſt inſpired teachers. For the prejudices which obſtructed the advancement of the chriſtian doctrine, and the diſputes and errors that vexed and corrupted the church in the earlieſt age, produced moſt of thoſe epiſtles of St Paul and the other apoſtles, which are included in our ſacred books. In the peruſal of theſe writings, many falſe notions would be

be avoided, did men always keep in mind the perſons for whoſe uſe, and the purpoſes for which they were immediately written. The perſons to whom they were addreſſed were all, new converts, young and unſettled in the faith; and hardly weaned, at beſt, from the prejudices, the national and popular prejudices of their former ſentiments. To ſuch, no apoſtle could write as unto ſpiritual: the labour of the teacher was not to build up the diſciple to perfection; but rather by the tendereſt care to nouriſh and keep alive an infant faith. In writing to ſuch perſons, the miniſter of the word was not diſcharged from that controverſy, and thoſe repreſentations of the chriſtian doctrine, which were adapted to convince the moſt virulent adverſaries of the faith. For his unſettled converts, ſtill dwelling among ſuch, were liable, obnoxious in an extreme, to the popular topics, which prevailed with bigotted men againſt the new doctrines. By theſe topics they were ever in danger of being perverted from the faith, they had embraced; more eſpecially when to ſophiſtical arguments were added the ſtrongeſt perſonal inducements: fear of perſecution, of impriſonments, loſs of all things, deſertion of relations and friends, torture, death and ignominy. But

if the disciples were proof against these trials, and not to be prevailed on absolutely to apostatize: yet, there ever appeared a conceited spirit of dogmatizing in some perverse men; who, wedded to their former notions, and attempting to reconcile them with the doctrines of Christ, had become the authors of destructive heresies. To these, as novices, they were liable to swerve, and so turn aside, even within the threshold of the church. On both these accounts, the sacred teachers were confined, in their labours, to the confutation of the prejudiced spirits of infidelity, that either barred the entrance of the church, or seduced those away who were entering: or else they were engaged in contending with that perverse spirit of dogmatizing, allied intimately with the former in its notions and principles; which, if it did not draw disciples from communion with the faithful, made them unstable at the best, where it prevailed; most probably contentious and heretical. In short, to express myself in St Paul's own words: his general purpose was, to provide his infant converts with the [u] sincere milk of the word that they might grow thereby; because they were as

[u] 1 Cor. c. 3. v. 2.

yet

yet unable to bear ſtrong [w] meat; or doctrines accommodated to the nouriſhment and proficiency of thoſe, who by reaſon of uſe, had their faculties exerciſed, and were able to diſtinguiſh in principle, between good and evil tendency. This is remarkably true of St Paul; who, conſidering himſelf more particularly as the apoſtle of the gentiles, though he ſtill bore the ſtrongeſt national attachment to his own countrymen; entered deeply into the diſcuſſion of thoſe doctrines in which the gentile converts were more particularly concerned, or moſt liable to be perverted. This made him inſiſt ſo continually on the gracious acceptance of ſinners, and labour ſo much in aſſerting the free juſtification of the faithful; in oppoſition to thoſe Jewiſh teachers who demanded the obſervance of all the ordinances of Moſes. Theſe and ſuch diſcuſſions of myſterious doctrine, rendered ſtill more obſcure by the bewildering ſophiſms and falſe notions to which they were oppoſed, have made St Paul's epiſtles more eſpecially hard to be underſtood; of which, as it was true in St Peter's time, it has manifeſtly appeared in every age ſince, [x] that the unlearned and unſtable have ever

[w] Heb. c. 5. v. 14. [x] 2 Pet. c. 3. v. 16.

wreſted them, not more to the deſtruction of themſelves, than the perverſion of chriſtian faith, and annihilation of chriſtian unity. Thus while the apoſtles had to miniſter to ſuch novices in ſpiritual things, they could not [y] leave the elementary doctrines of the goſpel: repentance from dead works, the faith expreſſed by confeſſion, the doctrines of baptiſm, and of juſtification by the chriſtian atonement: and thus were they prevented, by the neceſſities as well as weak underſtandings of their infant churches, from proceeding in direct continued diſcourſes to thoſe inſtructions, which were calculated to aſſiſt the more adult; who having made ſome proficiency, were followers of thoſe patriarchs, that through patience in a faith more and more eſtabliſhed, had inherited the promiſes. This ſo particular appropriation of the doctrines, for the moſt part, that occur in the epiſtolary writings, occaſions no little obſcurity in them, and obliges the ſtudent, to inquire with diligence, what was the ſtate of thoſe churches as to doctrine and manners, to whom they were addreſſed: that ſo, he may enter into the ſenſe and ſpirit of the ſacred writer.

[y] Heb. c. 6. v. 1.

The

The form alſo, in which the ſacred books convey the divine truths to us, occaſions ſome labour to read them with preciſe diſcernment, and underſtand them accurately. A dead language as is that of the ſcriptures is not to be learned with critical ſkill; without painful ſtudy, and laborious reſearches both grammatical and philological: but then, to balance this inconvenience, words in a dead language, if a learned language, have a ſignification far more definite and explicit, through the induſtrious labours of critical writers, than can be ſaid of any living language, or any now in uſe. But how far this will apply exactly to the ſacred writings, will admit of ſome doubt. It has been ſaid of Ariſtotle that his terms are only to be explained from himſelf: much more is this true, for obvious reaſons, of the inſpired writers; that they can only accurately be underſtood by comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual.

Yet further, prophecies are ever obſcure in their ſtile and nature, and ſo are thoſe paſſages in the new teſtament which foretell the ſtate of chriſtianity in future times. Books of prophecy are ever ſealed [z] books,

[z] If. c. 29. v. 10.

till the event unfolds them; and in the reading of them, there is great danger; leſt imagination uſurp upon ſober criticiſm; and preſcribe, under the notion of explaining them, a ſeries of events, that are merely conjectural and fantaſtical.

But theſe difficulties will hardly be mentioned as ſuch, when viewed in compariſon with the obſtruction that has ariſen from the vain ſophiſtry, which has gone on in every age perverting the truth, and perplexing the mind of every attentive inquirer, with fooliſh[a] and unlearned queſtions. In contemplating the chriſtian manifeſtations, there have ever been men of much learned leiſure, who, employing their talents in the ſearch of recondite truths, have fallen, for want of diſcretion, into the regions of truth, neither the objects of the human underſtanding, nor yet the ſubjects of divine manifeſtations. Such vain occupations have been the unhappy ſource of thoſe fooliſh queſtions, as St Paul calls them, which have involved ſuch proficients in wrangling and vain controverſy. And while neither party had a clear conception of the doctrine for which they were contending,

[a] 2 Tim. c. 2. v. 23.

they

they were ever liable to thoſe ill conſequences in argument, which ignorance of the point in queſtion is ſo apt to produce. But however, though abſolute myſteries have adminiſtered queſtions to ſophiſtry, they have given this uſeful leſſon; that in ſubjects of pure revelation, the mind is quickly bewildered when it quits ſight, though but for ever ſo ſhort a ſpace, of the clear light of the word of GOD.

Yet further, ſince there are, in the divine manifeſtations, truths abſtracted from vulgar apprehenſion, and myſterious in various degrees: it has happened; that men, by intruding, without neceſſary previous erudition, into the more abſtruſe parts of chriſtian doctrine, have perplexed themſelves on ſubjects, which, though not abſolutely myſterious, were ſo to them, becauſe they had not as yet arrived by the gradual advances which lead to them, to that eminence of learning from whence they might clearly diſcern them. This want of diſcretion which induces men to argue and draw concluſions from doctrines, before they themſelves have obtained a clear conception of them, has given riſe to thoſe unlearned queſtions, which originate in a fallacy. By ſophiſts of both theſe deſcriptions the ſimplicity

plicity of the chriſtian doctrine has been much corrupted, while ſuch unſkilful teachers have talked and written at random, for want of knowing [b] clearly what they ſaid, or whereof they affirmed. Hence it is become a proof of no vulgar diſcretion, juſtly to diſcriminate between doctrines as they are taught: whether they are objects of knowledge, and deſerve to be inquired into; or ſuch fruitleſs queſtions, as would only prove obſtructions in the way of the chriſtian philoſopher to proficiency in ſpeculative faith, or ſpiritual knowledge.

The following diſtinction, juſtly noticed, will contribute towards forming ſo deſirable a diſcretion. As faith in general conſiſts in a diligent adherence to preſcription; and not, by any means, in a perfection of ſentiment, which is not in fact conſiſtent with human frailty: ſo profeſſional faith lies in conformity of ſentiment to revealed doctrine, and does not imply a perfect attainment, or complete comprehenſion of thoſe revealed myſteries, which we now ſee through a glaſs, darkly; and therefore never perfectly underſtand. Hence chriſtian knowledge is far different from every other kind of knowledge,

[b] 1 Tim. c. 1. v. 7.

whether

whether phyſical or experimental: inaſmuch as the conviction, upon which the doctrines are received as principles, ariſes ſimply from the demonſtration that GOD has declared them, and not any internal evidence, as it is called.

If ſo, it ſeems to follow, that the ſafeſt conduct for the chriſtian ſtudent, when queſtionable doctrines fall in his way, as ſoon as he finds that he cannot diſcern their connexion or repugnance, to the word of GOD; is to throw aſide the controverſy entirely, before his judgment is quite bewildered in it. Nor will he, by ſuch a conduct, forego an opportunity of improvement; for no ſooner ſhall his native ſentiment recover from the embarraſſment which the controverſy had produced; than, if he be well verſed in the ſacred ſcriptures, he will find it far more eaſy to diſcern, what, in moſt queſtions, comes the neareſt to the doctrine of GOD; than he could have made it by the moſt laborious peruſal of the arguments brought by both parties. For ſince, under the chriſtian diſcipline, doctrines are received into the principles of men, while ſtill myſterious; thoſe perſons are very liable indeed, to error and falſe notion, who preſume to dogmatize on ſuch myſterious principles, and

and when once the human mind is enveloped in ſuch error, it wanders blindly on, miſled by its opinion, as an ignis fatuus of its own formation; till at laſt it puzzles itſelf ſo effectually, that it becomes totally infatuated. And there is no little danger in attempting to follow ſuch error through all its intricacies and ſubterfuges. Unleſs a man be poſſeſſed of uncommon penetration, he will find it impoſſible to diſperſe the clouds thrown round the ſubject, ſo as to preſerve a clear and candid judgment amidſt ſuch a ſcene of diſorder and confuſion.

The principal therefore, nay almoſt the ſole object of the man who would obtain a refined profeſſional faith, is to make himſelf deeply converſant in the word of GOD. Firſt, by the helps of ſober criticiſm and compariſon to prove the force of the expreſſions. Then, by gaining a diſtinct apprehenſion of the meaning of the terms uſed by inspired writers, to obtain an accurate conception of the doctrines and precepts delivered under them. And laſtly, as the reſult of all theſe pains, to acquire a comprehenſive knowledge if it may be obtained; and to crown the whole, a devout and lively impreſſion, of the nature, the tendency, and great importance of our high calling of GOD in

in Chriſt Jeſus, and of the privileges and advantages that attend it. And when it is conſidered what funds of information the chriſtian revelation opens to the mind, what helps it affords to the perception of refined truth, and what obſtacles it removes: the obedience of faith, even in reſpect to the formation of the underſtanding, and although it lies not ſo much in inveſtigation of truth, as in contemplation of divine manifeſtations, appears the reverſe of ſuperſtition, the trueſt free thinking, and perfection of human wiſdom.

But leſt this knowledge ſhould have a bad effect upon the mind, and puff it up as St Paul[c] expreſſes himſelf, let a man ever ſo account of all theſe acquiſitions, as our Lord preſcribes[d] to his diſciples, with reſpect to their practice. "When ye ſhall have done all "thoſe things which are commanded you, "ſay, we are unprofitable ſervants; we have "done that which was our duty to do." Much more than this may be truly ſaid of the knowledge to be acquired, by the moſt devout application to the word of GOD; for perfection belongs not to human opinions. Improvement, even under the radiance of the holy ſcrip-

[c] 1 Cor. c. 8. v. 1. [d] Luke. c. 17. v 10.

tures

tures muſt ſtill be progreſſive: and yet after all, as the eye abſolutely ſingle, ſo an accompliſhed erudition in ſpiritual knowledge exiſts not in this imperfect ſtate. For now we ſee through the medium of intellects never perfectly ſpiritualized. We[e] ſee, but it is, as through a glaſs, darkly: while the conſummation of wiſdom as of virtue, is the privilege of that ſtate of beatification alone, in the realms of perfect light.

Beſides this reaſon for poſſeſſing all ſpeculative improvement with modeſty, to what comparative eminence ſoever it may attain, St Paul[f], inſiſts on this other motive. "What "have we in the objects of chriſtian know-"ledge that we have not received? If ſo, "how can we glory as if we had not re-"ceived them?" As if the knowledge we acquire, were the fruit of our own penetration, the reſult of ſuperior genius and ſagacity; and not, as it is in fact, a bare perception of the manifeſtations made to us by GOD: in his moſt refined conception of which, man can poſſibly have no higher praiſe, than of attentive and diligent application to the word of GOD.

But this is not all, vain conceit and chriſ-

[e] 1 Cor. c. 13. v. 12. [f] 1 Cor. c. 4. v. 7.

tian

tian faith are oppoſite and irreconcileable in their nature. As every unregenerate conceit will prove a bar againſt the initiation of the chriſtian; ſo, every conceit taken up after admiſſion will obſtruct the progreſs of faith; and if not renounced, will oblige him in time to turn aſide, and to renounce his faith. Yet 'tis true, we meet in the epiſtles of St Paul, with precepts to this purport: "[g] be "not carried about like children, with every "wind of doctrine: and, [h] hold faſt the form "of ſound words that ye have received." In which precepts, a conſiderable confidence and aſſurance of faith are preſcribed. But the objects of ſuch aſſurance are the ſacred oracles themſelves, which as far as their clear unequivocal light will direct us, are unqueſtionable authority of doctrine and of principle. But the doctrines that have been framed, ſince the ages of inſpiration, are an object widely different. Through the conceit, through the vain curioſity, through the ſleight and cunning craftineſs of men, the ſimplicity of the goſpel of Chriſt has been corrupted, and fooliſh and unlearned queſtions, vain philoſophy, with pernicious and abominable hereſies have been brought in,

[g] Epheſ. c. 4. v. 17. [h] 2 Tim. c. 1. v. 13.

upon

upon pretended authority of the word of GOD. In oppoſition to theſe, ſome learned, and ſome well meaning men have attempted to explain and define the true doctrine: and moreover, to exclude heretics from the communion of the faithful, forms of confeſſion have been framed upon theſe explanations. Theſe confeſſions are wiſely required, as things are now conſtituted, that religious communities and national churches may be eſtabliſhed upon a general uniformity of ſentiment: ſo that pernicious heretics being excluded, the ſociety may be maintained in unity of ſpirit, and the bond of peace. But the doctrines that are defined in the confeſſions of national churches are rather concluſions from the word of GOD, than the important doctrines of religion. There are many errors and falſe notions which, in articles of communion, are judiciouſly preſcribed againſt; and yet the queſtions, that gave riſe to them, come not profeſſionally, by any means, into the contemplation of the believer. Nay, many of the doctrines, by which ſuch errors are oppoſed, are no where clearly defined, much leſs preſcribed as articles of faith or confeſſion, in the ſacred writings. Nay more than this, when men of learning and leiſure have made ſuch doctrines

trines objects of diſquiſition, no two of them perhaps have framed their notions with an exact uniformity. In ſuch points of dogma, meekneſs and modeſty of ſentiment characterize the true believer, how clear and refined ſoever his conceptions. In the diſcuſſion of ſuch queſtions he treads on dangerous ground. A confidence, or vain conceit of his qualifications, while he cautiouſly avoids an error on the one ſide, may expoſe him to the danger of falling into the oppoſite extreme. But if it does not ſo betray him, if it render him opinionated, obſtinate and dogmatical in his notions, it ſhuts up the paſſages to improvement, and roots up that chriſtian charity, which ſhall have place above, even at that future period, when faith and hope ſhall be no more.

SERMON VII.

JAMES. I. 22.

Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own ſelves.

IT is impoſſible to read the diſcourſes of our divine maſter with ſerious attention, and not perceive the ſtrongeſt moral tendency in every part of them. In that upon the mount, he inculcates in the moſt direct terms, an exalted piety towards GOD, a ſocial diſpoſition the moſt generous, and the ſtricteſt ſelf government. If the ſtudent paſs on from this diſcourſe and conſider the doctrines of his maſter as they are to be collected from his parables, ſtill he will perceive the ſtricteſt obligation laid upon him to continue, in what St Paul calls, the obedience of faith; or in conformity to a diſcipline, pro-

 ductive

ductive of no vulgar moral accompliſhments. Nay, the [a]excluſion of thoſe from the divine favour, who fail of ſuch a conformity, is plainly denounced in more than one parable: and yet, that a truth ſo important might not be overlooked, it is not inculcated in parables alone: but alſo laid down in other parts of his diſcourſes [b], in the moſt direct and explicit terms. From the goſpels let the ſtudent paſs on to the epiſtles, even to the moſt controverſial writings of St Paul. It muſt be confeſſed, from the terms in which the apoſtle found it neceſſary to ſtate the doctrines of juſtification in the ſight of GOD, and the divine acceptance of ſinners graciouſly, in oppoſition to erroneous teachers; that unlearned and unſtable men have actually drawn concluſions from theſe, as if Chriſt required not obedience in manners, of his followers. But this concluſion was not juſtly chargeable on the apoſtle; for in every ſuch epiſtle, after the controverſial topics are diſcuſſed, he ever proceeds to deliver moral precepts, rules of conduct in the ſeveral relations of life: and conſtantly deſcribes the ſtate of men comprehended under the chriſtian mercy, as of men [c] created in

[a] Matt. c. 25. v. 1. [b] Matt. c. 7. v. 21. [c] Epheſ. c. 2. v. 10.

Chriſt

Chriſt Jeſus unto good works, which "GOD "hath before ordained that we ſhould walk "in them." But if ſome entire books of St Paul had been hard to be underſtood in any moral ſenſe; others of his writings moſt fully aſſert the chriſtian obligations to live according to the precepts, the moral precepts of the goſpel. Nay if the whole of St Paul's writings had been confined to controverſy, and of courſe had been merely doctrinal, and conveyed no moral inſtruction; ſtill, the writings of the other inſpired teachers, ought ſufficiently to have defended the chriſtian doctrine againſt any ſuch interpretations as gave a deſcription of the chriſtian religion, different in idea, from a doctrine according to godlineſs.

From the period of repentance the convert, juſtified, by the grace of GOD, through faith, and regenerated by baptiſm, proceeds to cultivate his faith, [d] inconſiderable though it be, in the beginning, as a grain of muſtard ſeed: that, being watched with inceſſant care, and weeded by continual mortification, it may [e] grow to maturity; and bring forth [f], by perſeverance in the chriſtian diſcipline, the fruits of the ſpirit in abundance.

[d] Matt. c. 13. v. 31. Matt. c. 17. v. 20. [e] Mark. c. 4. v. 26, 27. [f] Luke. c. 8. v. 15.

Many perſons in the age neareſt to that of the apoſtles, having experienced the difficulty of ſtruggling againſt the temptations of the world, and ſenſible that they were always in danger, by their intercourſe with it, of being again intangled in the affections, which they had denied, therefore renounced all ſociety, and fled to deſerts and ſolitude as an aſylum. But, allowing that by ſuch retirement they were enabled to obtain the true ideal philoſophic freedom from paſſion (which is not the caſe) their conduct is not to be approved. For, in the firſt place, they put it out of their power hereby to perform their part in life, and to adorn the ſtation in which providence had placed them with the virtues of their chriſtian profeſſion. And, furthermore, ſuch apprehenſions are not to be reconciled with a due attention and faith in thoſe promiſes of their maſter, by which they are taught to look for every aid, in return to the prayers of the faithful, which the exigencies of their ſituation may at any time demand. Their motives therefore of precaution and expediency are by no means admiſſible, and their conduct, upon this plea at leaſt, is injudicious, if not cenſurable.

To frame a compendium of chriſtian ethics, from the laws and precepts as they lie ſcattered

tered in the word of GOD, is an attempt far beyond my ambition. That no ſuch compendium was framed in the age of inſpiration, is a proof (if a proof were neceſſary) that the chriſtian diſpenſation was not deſigned entirely or principally to appear as a religion; no not though the end of GOD in the redemption of mankind, was "to purify "a peculiar people to himſelf, zealous of "good works." Yet, although the goſpel does not furniſh its diſciples with a regular ſyſtem of ethics; its precepts beſpeak ſo refined a ſpirit of morality, and convey principles of ſuch accompliſhed virtue, in every branch of moral inſtruction, as to leave no room to regret the abſence of a ſyſtematical religion. But who can catch the ſpirit of conſummate purity and truth? Or what mortal can diſpel thoſe miſts which dim his preſent ſight, ſo as to diſcern, on his characteriſtic principles, the perfect fair and good completely? While the ſon of GOD taught his choſen diſciples in perſon, there were many, very many things that occurred to him in the courſe of his inſtruction, which yet he could not communicate, becauſe his followers were not able to bear, and could not receive them. So will it be, to the end of time: ſuch incapacity, however remedied

in.

in part by chriſtian diſcipline, will lie upon every ſon of Adam, while he ſtill bears the image of his earthy progenitor.

Let us follow nevertheleſs, at whatever diſtance from the truth, the courſe of our meditations.

St Paul has compriſed the moral precepts of his Lord in the exhortations, to live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent world: following herein the ordinary diſtinctions of moral virtue, into the private, the ſocial, and the religious.

The exhortation to live ſoberly is rather a negative precept, if taken in a ſenſe no more extended, than the words convey, according to the Engliſh idiom; for in its utmoſt latitude it goes no farther, than to forbid all thoſe exceſſes, which diſorder the mind or body. But in this ſenſe it falls far ſhort of the apoſtle's meaning, and does not come up even to the philoſophical idea of ſoberneſs. The term [g] he uſes to expreſs the quality, has perhaps the moſt comprehenſive ſignification of any found in ethic writers; and to live ſoberly (in St Paul's idea [h]) is to poſſeſs three of the cardinal virtues: prudence, fortitude, and temperance, and includes all thoſe

[g] Σωφρονως. [h] Mens ſana.

internal

internal graces that become a ſound mind, attentive to the improvement, regulation and government of itſelf.

Chriſtian ſoberneſs is the ſame excellent quality, as philoſophic prudence; of which the improvement of the underſtanding and the cultivation of knowledge, are eſſential parts: but the objects of inquiry that philoſophic prudence and chriſtian ſoberneſs, equally, recommend, by no means terminate in unintereſting theory; for while the one employs the mind about whatever is true, becoming and uſeful in the ſeveral relations of life; the other directs the ſearch to whatever in ſentiment and conduct becomes the goſpel of Chriſt; and to the manner in which the faithful profeſſor ſhould think and act at all times. Yet the taſk of ethic prudence and chriſtian ſoberneſs is not ended in the cultivation of the underſtanding: for from hence the firſt proceeds by the ſubjection of the appetites, to keep the judgment free, diſpaſſionate and collected; that it may not be ſwayed by any improper motive, that it may neither be deceived by appearances; nor hurried into unbecoming determination and conduct by ſurpriſe and precipitancy. The ſame is true of chriſtian ſoberneſs: for though the moſt diſtinguiſhed knowledge were attained;

tained; and the chriſtian philoſopher could inveſtigate [i] with great acuteneſs the moſt abſtruſe doctrines; or define, with accuracy, upon the moſt perplexing queſtions, that occupy the vain and the unlearned to ſo little purpoſe; yet, unleſs an accompliſhed practice reſulted from all this knowledge, it would become an unſubſtantial baſis of chriſtian hope, a vain ſcience of unfruitful ſpeculation. But, if it prevail to the ſuppreſſion of the ſenſual and worldly appetites; ſo as to transfer the wiſhes and deſires of the redeemed, from things temporal to things eternal; if it prevail to the ſubjection of all thoſe worldly fears [k], and worldly motives, which ſtand in the way of undiſtinguiſhing obedience to the commands of GOD: then is it (incomplete though it be in this ſtate of frailty) intitled to the honourable denomination of chriſtian ſoberneſs. What then is the moſt characteriſtic feature of this refined, this excellent moral quality? If, where the whole is in ſome ſenſe peculiar and appropriate, inaſmuch as the chriſtian mind receives its whole direction from the word of GOD, any line can indeed be called more eminently characteriſtic than another: per-

[i] 1 Cor. c. 13. v. 1. [k] Matt. c. 10. v. 28.

ſeverance

ſeverance in that diſpoſition which at firſt denominated the convert, ſeems the moſt diſtinguiſhing feature of chriſtian ſoberneſs. For the greater part of our maſter's bleſſings are, in the ſtricteſt interpretation of the words, annexed to this temper: "[l] bleſſed "are the poor in ſpirit, bleſſed are they that "mourn, bleſſed are the meek, bleſſed are "they that hunger and thirſt after righteouſ-"neſs. In which words, the mortified ſpirit, the converted[m], ſingle mind untainted with conceit, the diffident and modeſt temper, and the anxious cultivator of every virtuous diſpoſition; in ſhort the ſpirits diſpoſed to follow an humble unaſſuming faith, are moſt eminently endowed, according to the divine word and promiſes, with all the privileges of the goſpel. But neither a vain confidence and furious zeal for dogma, or opinion; nor on the other hand a careleſs inattention to the repoſitaries of ſacred doctrine, can be derived from this ſource; any more than pride, envy, wrath, voluptuouſneſs and ſenſuality; to which they are moſt commonly allied either as cauſes or effects. For however any of theſe may carry before them, as a pretext, the love of truth, of GOD, and of

[l] Matt. c. 5. [m] Matt. c. 18. v. 3.

religion;

religion; or of peace and charity: ſtill the expreſſions will betray the origin of ſuch diſpoſitions, and ſhow them ſprung from obſtinate and inveterate conceit, or unmortified ungodly luſts.

Such the ſource, and in ſuch channel runs the firſt branch of chriſtian morality: the next fountain of duty, that occurs in this paſſage of St Paul, is to live righteouſly.

To render to all men what is due to them[n], and that, not only in queſtions of property, but alſo of honour and reſpect; and perform beſides, the offices of humanity, liberality, and good nature; ſeem to comprehend every ſocial obligation. But if to follow the rule of right be conſidered as a principle of behaviour laid down, it is by far too vague and abſtracted to ſerve as a directory what conduct becomes a man at all times. For though that ſenſe, which is common to all the partakers of reaſon, points[o] out what is juſt and equitable in the conduct of one man to another, to be alſo true becoming and uſeful in the higheſt degree, whether a man be conſidered ſingly, or in his relative capacity; yet it is unqueſtionable that by the intricate combinations[p] of contigent circum-

[n] Rom. c. 13. v. 7. [o] Cic. de Leg. [p] Cic. de Off. L. I. §. 10.

ſtances,

ſtances, not only the appearances, but, in ſome ſenſe, the nature of things may be ſo altered; that the beſt caſuiſt could not invariably define with preciſion, what conduct was becoming, according to the moſt perfect equity. The principle therefore is more vague than becomes the univerſal ſtandard of civil and ſocial obligation: but were it more definite, while it is left to every man to interpret this rule for himſelf, it will be found dangerous, as an arbitrary ſtandard, in the hands of man; whoſe ſelfiſh paſſions and affections are too ſtrongly intereſted in the intercourſe of life, to permit him to explain, with unbyaſſed judgment, in his own caſe, the dictates of an abſtract general precept. For this reaſon, our divine maſter, even when he had ſubſtituted, in the precept of philanthropy, his own peculiar principle of ſocial obligation; did not ſend his diſciple to thoſe ſocial affections implanted in man, to be taught how to apply this principle; although theſe affections very forcibly incline him to ſympathy and humanity: but adapted [q] ſelf-love to his purpoſe, and left it in charge to his followers to love their neighbour as themſelves, and perform that part to others,

[q] Matt. c. 7. v. 12.

which

which their own wiſhes would lead them to expect, in an exchange of circumſtances. By the transformation of the principle of ſocial obligation from moral juſtice to chriſtian charity, the demands of one man upon another, wear a very different aſpect from that which appears upon the ſtatings of lawgivers and philoſophers. Under this new ſocial principle, forbearance and the forgiveneſs of injuries, with all thoſe virtues that beſpeak a lowlineſs and meekneſs of diſpoſition, appear in the foremoſt rank of duties; and it muſt be acknowledged, that however, by the ſtandard of philoſophic truth or ſelf eſtimation, they may be condemned as [r] the weakneſs of timid or indolent men; yet when they flow from this right principle, they are noble and amiable qualities, highly conducive to the peace and well ordering of ſociety, allied to fortitude, and expreſſive of no vulgar conqueſt over the paſſions. So comprehenſive is this principle of charity that under it every law of the ſecond table is inculcated. [s] For the commandments: thou ſhalt not kill; thou ſhalt not commit adultery; thou ſhalt not ſteal; thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs; thou ſhalt not covet; honour thy

[r] Cicero. [s] Rom. c. 13.

father

father and mother: all these, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. For love worketh no ill to his neighbour therefore love is the fulfilling of the law: because this amiable virtue of charity exercised according to the standard of self-love, and subsisting jointly with that meek and modest temper, the dictate of christian soberness, leaves no room for wrath, strife, seditions, envyings, and vain glory: while[t] each is disposed to esteem other better than himself; and is taught to seek[u] not his own but the good of others.

The third branch of duty, is to live godly in this present world.

In this precept is comprised that first of all human obligations, (both in its object and for its extensive influence) the duty to the greatest and best of beings.

These obligations, seem by equitable construction to have received considerable augmentation since the redemption of the human race, the mysterious expiation of the offences of the species, and satisfaction by the blood of the great christian sacrifice. But what new expressions of piety can be added to the

[t] Phil. c. 2. v. 3. [u] 1 Cor. c. 10. v. 24.

dictates

dictates of natural light and natural conſcience? Can ſubmiſſion and devotion be greater? Can fear, and reverence be more full, than what was due, by the law of reaſon, to the Creator the governor of the world, the remunerator of moral agents? What pious ſentiments of GOD, in ſhort, can be now adopted, in addition to thoſe before enforced by former manifeſtations of himſelf? But though it be not poſſible to think of GOD more highly than the light of nature diſcovered him, man ſeeth himſelf in a far different light. He no longer appears a moral agent, ſtanding high in the divine favour by the preeminence of his ſpecies, and the excellence of his moral accompliſhments: but as a being convicted of having depraved his moral ſenſe; by a mere act of grace, reſtored to the divine favour; and now ſubſiſting in it by the continuance of that ſame ceaſeleſs bounty. His confidence is not now the conceit of merit; but the affiance of modeſt faith in the divine promiſes; his aſſurance is the aſſurance of hope alone; while even his virtue no longer redounds to the praiſe of a cultivated moral ſenſe; but ſubſiſts in the practical profeſſion of faith, the ſubmiſſive obedience to chriſtian precept. Notwithſtanding theſe peculiar ſentiments of the

the chriſtian, the acts of devotion may ſtill be juſtly viewed as formerly, and divided into thoſe of a public nature, as worſhip and profeſſion, and private expreſſions, as prayer, ſupplication and thankſgiving.

There is no country ſo ſavage, no nation ſo barbarous (ſays the Roman orator) in which an eſtabliſhment of public worſhip is not to be found. The modes of worſhip have ever been as different as the languages of nations: and the ſame is true in chriſtian countries, that their religious rites and ceremonies, and their public liturgies are peculiar to national churches: but times, perſons and places have been ſet apart univerſally for the ſervice of religion. Paſſing over thoſe reaſons for the inſtitution of religious aſſemblies, as beſide our purpoſe, rational and cogent though they be, which ariſe from inſtinctive impreſſions of the power and univerſal ſovereignty of GOD: the zeal of men for the increaſe and continuance of public welfare, whether the community be a political body, a corporate or ſtill narrower circle, would ſeem of courſe to point out a ſocial devotion, and ſo would the intereſt of the church of GOD, by religious aſſemblies, beſt extended and advanced. But the divine precept by wich ſocial worſhip is directed,

is

is explicit: and the performance is encouraged beſides by the promiſe of our Lord himſelf: "that where his ſervants are aſſembled for this purpoſe, he will be in the "midſt of them," moſt propitiouſly to hear and anſwer their petitions.

Add to this, that men by their regular appearance in the congregations of their chriſtian brethren, make an open profeſſion of their union with Chriſt and with his church. This certainly was a reaſon, as well as the inſtruction of the apoſtles, why the diſciples were ſo continually [w] aſſembled for religious purpoſes, as they are repreſented to have been in the earlieſt period of the church; for which duty, the large funds raiſed by throwing all the property of chriſtians into a common ſtock, and the conſtant diſtributions made out of it, gave them leiſure, without any ſecular interruption. The practices, as the circumſtances of the church, have ſince altered: yet the uſefulneſs of public exhortation, if not of public inſtruction, as well as the honour of God, which is reflected by an univerſal profeſſion of religion, renders a due attendance on public worſhip, a duty to which the practice of the truly wiſe and

[w] Acts. c. 2. v. 42, 46.

good

good in every age, have given a better ſanction and teſtimony, than that it ſhould now be laboured, as a point of doctrine requiring new proof or confirmation.

But profeſſion is not confined to temples or the times of religious aſſembly: there muſt occur to every man, frequent occaſions beſides, in which the concealment of his principles will be equivalent to a denial of them. An inſtance of this is recorded by St John[x]: "among the chief rulers, ſays the "evangeliſt; many believed on our Lord; "but they did not confeſs him, leſt they "ſhould be put out of the ſynagogue." Had theſe men ſtood forth in vindication of the Meſſiah in the Sanhedrim, or had they given him their countenance with the people, they might have done the cauſe of his faith eſſential ſervice; but they were afraid of ſharing the fate of a devoted man; and therefore by their ſilence, and acquieſcence, appeared to join in the ſentence of his enemies. Such cold friends as theſe therefore are included, no leſs than adverſaries in this ſentence of our Lord[y]: "whoſoever ſhall confeſs me "before men, him ſhall the ſon of man con-"feſs, before the angels of GOD: but he

[x] c. 12. v. 42. [y] Luke. c. 12. v. 8, 9.

" that denieth me before men, ſhall be de-
" nied before the angels of God." Thus is it declared to be not leſs a duty of chriſtianity, than it is a ſuggeſtion of fortitude, to avow and defend what is right: inſomuch that he is not more a chriſtian, than he is a man of moral character, who from timidity or any ſordid paſſion, denies or acts againſt his principles, or ſilently ſuffers them to be condemned. Notwithſtanding this: ſome bounds are to be ſet to profeſſion. For a fervent zeal, ſubſiſting even with a ſingle and good intention; yet, without knowledge, will ever do more harm than good to the cauſe that it eſpouſes. In the firſt perſecutions many warm men obtruded themſelves upon the magiſtrates, deſiring to be allowed to confeſs and ſuffer for their faith. The vulgar, taken with the appearance of reſolution, and forward attachment to the cauſe, highly applauded this conduct: not ſo the wiſer rulers of the church: theſe gave it as their advice, by no means to run needleſſly into danger. For it was proved, by many diſgraceful examples, that a fervour of zeal might carry thoſe into temptation, who, not having ſtrength of mind to ſupport them under the horrors of torture and a lingering death, in the hour of trial retracted their confeſſion,

confeſſion, and baſely apoſtatized from the faith.

From public profeſſion and ſervice, godlineſs willingly retires to private devotion; where, concealed from every mortal eye [z], no temptation may intrude to prompt a ſiniſter motive, or call off its attention. To this ſacred retreat, oſtentation and hypocriſy cannot approach.

Not that devotion is confined to cloiſters, to ſolitude or to cloſets. The holy ſpirit, abiding continually in the heart of the true profeſſor, conſecrates it, to be a temple for himſelf: a temple in which every act of devotion is conſtantly performed; but in a manner, perceivable by him alone, who ſeeth in ſecret. Thus, his religion enters, with the man of buſineſs, even into the public walks; not to diſtract his attention, not to check his induſtry: but in ſucceſs to govern him, to be a guide to him in difficulties, a guardian in dangers, and a refuge in diſtreſſes.

Yet not content with this habitual exerciſe, Chriſtian godlineſs has alſo its ſeaſons of private prayer; in which it may pour forth every affection that is conſiſtent with its habitual temper, its fears, its wiſhes and

[z] Matt. c. 6. v. 6.

its gratitude: when every offence and every folly may be acknowledged, when pardon, aid, and all improvement may be ſupplicated, and every mercy received may be referred to him that gave it.

Thus does the doctrine of GOD our Saviour operate on the minds, and influence the whole conduct of his ſervants: pervading their diſpoſitions and directing thoſe ſecret ſprings of their actions, by which their character in every relation is denominated.

All virtues like all ſciences bear a near affinity to each other, and are linked together by a cloſe and indiſſoluble tie; ſo that if one be cultivated, it will introduce the reſt; or one be excluded, the reſt muſt follow. Thus without chriſtian ſoberneſs, the ſocial virtues and charity fade, and even change their nature. What: though there be the moſt unreſerved beneficence, in ſuch profuſion as ſhall paſs with the inconſiderate, for the higheſt liberality: yet, unleſs it be guided by prudence and diſcretion, it will drain to waſte the ſources of real beneficence, and not leave ſufficient to anſwer the claims of juſtice and equity. Without ſoberneſs, godlineſs alſo loſes its venerable aſpect. It may be ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſm or fanaticiſm, but

but there can be no true profeſſion where zeal and knowledge are not aſſociated.

In like manner without charity, or chriſtian ſocial virtue, [a] ſoberneſs and prudence degenerate into mere ſelfiſhneſs, a ſelfiſhneſs the more dangerous to ſociety, the more collected it be within itſelf, the more correct its meaſures. And as to godlineſs: without charity it is the mere grimace of religion, a formal hypocritical profeſſion, abominable in the ſight of GOD: for GOD is not mocked; and himſelf hath commanded "[b] that he "who loveth GOD, ſhould love his brother "alſo.

Laſtly; without godlineſs there can be no true or uſeful religion whatever. Atheiſts and Deiſts may talk, as they pleaſe, how conformable truth is to nature, and of the natural obligations to intrinſic virtue, independent of the conſideration of the will of GOD. But what is to reſtrain men from following the moſt pernicious appetites who live without GOD in the world? Experience has ſhown in every age, that neither the beauty of virtue, nor all thoſe reaſons, which in theory render it ſo lovely and amiable, were ever able to form a barrier againſt the

[a] Cicero. [b] 1 Jo. c. 4. v. 21.

violence of paſſion and appetite: and that every additional ſanction of human laws, of the reciprocal ties of honour, and the fears of an equitable retribution at the hand of the ſupreme Being; were requiſite to enforce the virtues which are neceſſary for the ſubſiſtence of ſociety. But in a conſideration of practical faith, or chriſtian morality, this method of reaſoning upon expediency, is by far unequal to the argument it goes to confirm. Our profeſſion has for its inducements, a painful ſenſe of natural depravity, and conſequent eſtrangement from GOD; and a ſuitable pleaſure in the aſſurance of redemption from ſuch a ſtate, effected. A mind therefore ſtill wandering in habitual eſtrangement, entirely prone to the things of that world through which it is paſſing, untouched with ſentiments of piety, is totally inconſiſtent with the ſpiritual life of the believer.

Such are the fruits of faith acting under chriſtian diſcipline. How complete and perfect the character in which chriſtian ſoberneſs, charity and godlineſs, are properly blended and united. Such are the fruits[c] alſo by which the tree may now be known,

[c] Matt. c. 7. v. 16.

and

and will be judged hereafter. When the author of our faith ſhall take account of all the talents now ſo variouſly diſtributed, an improvement in a ſmall degree ſhall not loſe its juſt praiſe; but the unprofitable ſervant ſhall be excluded from any participation in the joy of his Lord.

SERMON VIII.

MATT. VI. 24.

Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doeth them I will liken him unto a wiſe man which built his houſe upon a rock.

IN the acknowledgement of the ſon of GOD as the author of our ſalvation, and our hope, the faith of aſſent conſiſts; a quality which as ſoon as it is produced, denominates a man a believer, by virtue of which character, he is admitted to become a partaker of all the preſent privileges conferred by the grace of GOD. But as faith is the principle of the life of the believer, it exhibits various characteriſtic qualities, both profeſſional and practical. Theſe qualities are continually improving, and produce by perſeverance, and application to the functions of his

his high calling, in his reſpective ſtation and capacity, the qualifications, which at the awful judgment of mankind will be demanded of him, as the improvement requiſite to his final acceptance.

In this inveſtigation, the duty has appeared moſt naturally branched out into theſe two kinds, profeſſional and practical, both gradual: the firſt is abſolutely appropriate to the chriſtian, though bearing a viſible analogy to the human obligations under every former diſpenſation: the other is in ſome ſenſe common to all religions, though bearing in this, the ſtrongeſt characteriſtic marks of the profeſſional principles with which it is united. Both of theſe are neceſſary, both eſſential in true faith. Though this be ſo evident a truth; yet there have ever been men, zealouſly addicted to an opinion in religion; who have placed the whole duty of a chriſtian in receiving a particular ſyſtem, as the object of their firm attachment. This their ſyſtem, excluſively of all others, they have diſtinguiſhed with the appellation of chriſtian doctrine, and ſubmiſſion to it, with the honourable denomination of faith. Like the Phariſees in the time of our Saviour, they have drawn up forms of confeſſion, arbitrary in a great meaſure, and then demanded that all

all Chriſtendom ſhould bow down to the idol which they had ſet up. Moreover, in the warmth of their zeal on this occaſion they uſually ſurpaſs the Babylonian monarch himſelf, by denouncing death, not only temporal but eternal, againſt every infidel, as they call him; or in other words, againſt every man who thinks differently from themſelves. Were the tenets for which theſe zealots contend ſo ſtrenuouſly, the important doctrines of our ſalvation, thoſe doctrines which muſt of neceſſity enter into the confeſſion of every believer; or were they the plain precepts upon which the chriſtian diſcipline is formed, and by which its practice is regulated: a profeſſion of them, zealous in a degree, would be highly becoming; and were the zeal even to exceed the bounds of ſtrict diſcretion ſomewhat, it might be excuſable from the infirmity of human nature. But important doctrines are too clearly manifeſted, to require the enforcements of zeal to ſupport them; which therefore, with a fury, more than barbarian, contends for tenets, unimportant; points of dogma neither clearly aſcertained in the word of GOD, nor intelligible in any conſtruction of them. Such conceit of opinion, or zeal ſo deſtructive of peace and charity can by no means

be

be reconciled with that meekneſs and modeſty which moſt ſtrongly characterize a true chriſtian faith. And moreover, the conſequences of placing the whole of a believer's obligations in confeſſion, according to a particular ſyſtem, are extremely fatal to chriſtian diſcipline, by tending to produce a neglect of the moral precepts, and of the diſpoſitions they are calculated to produce. Such a religion as this, which has no ſupport in the teſtimony of conſcience, differs widely from the principles of St Paul, according to his own deſcription [a]: and though his authority is moſt commonly alledged for it, he ſeems to reprobate expreſſly in theſe words, all ſuch interpretations of doctrine, as place faith and a good conſcience in oppoſition: "[b] this charge I commit unto thee ſon Ti- "mothy, that thou mighteſt war a good "warfare; holding faith and a good con- "ſcience: which ſome having put away, "concerning faith have made ſhipwreck. "Of whom are Hymeneus and Alexander, "whom I have delivered to Satan, that they "may learn not to blaſpheme." Our Lord alſo himſelf has plainly made the conduct of the chriſtian, the teſt of his faith; and

[a] Acts. c. 24. v. 16. [b] 1 Tim. c. 1. v. 18.

declared

declared[c] that, in that awful day, when he will finally accept or reject thoſe, who now profeſs themſelves his diſciples, it ſhall not avail any one to call on him for ſalvation, whoſe practice has not been conformable to his precepts; no not though he could juſtly aſſert, that he had prophecied, and wrought miracles in his name.

But if it be an error of dangerous tendency thus to lay the whole ſtreſs of religion upon ſpeculative aſſent and profeſſion; the oppoſite extreme has alſo a fatal tendency to defeat the purpoſes of the goſpel, through defect of principle. By thoſe who diſapprove of the conduct of the Antinomians, and the zeal of all religioniſts; it ſeems to be adopted as a firſt principle, that they need only concern themſelves to follow the moral dictates of their underſtanding: for as all zealots lay claim to the authority of ſcripture, in ſupport of every dogma impoſed by them as an article of confeſſion, neceſſary to ſalvation; theſe others, too careleſs to examine the authority of ſuch a claim, lay aſide and neglect to conſult the goſpel as a religion; as if it were only calculated to puzzle men with knotty queſtions: and think they fully ſa-

[c] Matt. c. 7. v. 21.

tisfy

tisfy their obligations, if they tranſgreſs not againſt the laws of their country, and the cuſtoms and expectations of the world. It is very true, that a bad life is the worſt of all hereſies. It muſt alſo be acknowledged, that many queſtions which have been repreſented as important doctrines, have very little real connection with chriſtianity. Nevertheleſs it cannot in reaſon be ſuppoſed unimportant, whether a man be acquainted or not with the truths delivered by GOD for his inſtruction; nor are the diſcourſes of the author of our ſalvation of ſuch ſmall conſequence, that it ſhould not ſignify whether they were or were not attended to. For, inattention to the means whereby the redemption of mankind has been effected, muſt render every religious profeſſion merely formal and inefficacious; and alſo greatly enervate the principle of hope, which is ſo neceſſary in the chriſtian warfare. And moreover the want of acquaintance with the precepts of Chriſt and the inſpired teachers, will be very inadequately compenſated by a ſtrict attention to the demands of national laws, to the expectations of men of buſineſs in their intercourſe with each other, even though the obligations of honour and good nature, according to the general eſtimation,

be

be ſuperadded. For (I ſpeak as to wiſe men) the maxims of all, even the refined claſſes of mankind, have deviated from the purity of the goſpel, by length of time, and the [d] prevalence of iniquity; which at intervals has abounded in every part of Chriſtendom: ſo that in books [e] no leſs than in living characters, they have fallen far ſhort of the ſtandard of original chriſtian precept. It is therefore highly neceſſary that diligent application and continual reference be made to the word of GOD: in order that the branch of Chriſt may continue inſeparably united to its true vine, in principle and ſentiment; deriving his information perpetually, as the principles of his vegetation, from that root, and only genuine ſource of ſpiritual nouriſhment.

The truly chriſtian character, the conduct of him whoſe hopes and religion are founded on a ſubſtantial baſis, lies therefore between theſe two extremes, where a religious and devout attention is paid to all the truths that are taught of GOD: an attention terminating in conformity. Our Saviour's deſcription of the wiſe man who built his houſe upon a rock moſt fully ſpeaks this language:

[d] Matt. c. 24. v. 12. [e] Cic. Tuſc. Queſt. L. III.

and

and St James[f] deſcribes the believer's obligations in the ſame manner: "receive with "meekneſs the engrafted word which is "able to ſave your ſouls. But be ye doers "of the word and not hearers only, deceiving "your own ſelves. For if any man be a "hearer of the word and not a doer, he is "like unto a man beholding his natural face "in a glaſs: for he beholdeth himſelf, and "goeth his way, and ſtraightway forgetteth "what manner of man he was. But whoſo "looketh into the perfect law of liberty and "continueth therein, he being not a for-"getful hearer but a doer of the work, this "man ſhall be bleſſed in his deed."

Were I qualified to ſum up the character of perfect faith; of faith, in which whatever is excellent in profeſſion is blended with whatever in practice is accompliſhed, it would excite, as Cicero ſaid of virtue, could it be exemplified to our view, the moſt aſtoniſhing admiration of itſelf. But as it exceeds the human capacity to frame a complete delineation of the principle, ſo various, ſo excellent, ſo on all ſides ſeparate from error; in like manner the qualifications that contribute to make up the accompliſhed chriſtian

[f] c. 1. v. 21.

are

are too refined to enter the conception of any but a proficient in the word. Nay more, were even ſuch a one to attempt himſelf to expreſs the character; he would fail to render it an object of general view, and adequate eſtimation; unleſs he could alſo, with a power equal to that which his maſter exerciſed, give ſight at the ſame time to the blind. For while the ſpiritual[g] man is exalted to ſuch eminence, that from thence he can clearly ſee and eſtimate the principles of all other men; he is himſelf a character ſo far abſtracted from vulgar apprehenſion, as that he alone can be judged of no man.

But if any novice in ſpiritual things ſhould be led to give credit to the ſuggeſtions of prejudiced unbelievers, and ſuſpect that this circumſtance is owing to ſomething viſionary or enthuſiaſtic in the chriſtian's principles, ſomething that will not bear the ſcrutiny of the ſevereſt reaſon; St Paul's deſcription of the whole armour of GOD, viewed attentively, will teach him to form a different opinion of the characteriſtic accompliſhments of the believer. He will then perceive that the qualifications of ſuch a man are exquiſitely chaſte and correct, and that

[g] 1 Cor. c. 2.

the only account to be given, why they are not generally underſtood, comprehended, and admired, proceeds, as is no uncommon caſe, from the comparatively low and defective moral conceptions of thoſe who pretend to eſtimate them. "[h] Stand, ſays the apoſtle, "having your loins girt about with truth, "and having on the breaſtplate of righ-"teouſneſs; and your feet ſhod with the "preparation of the goſpel of peace; above "all taking the ſhield of faith, wherewith "ye ſhall be able to quench all the fiery "darts of the wicked. And take the hel-"met of ſalvation, and the ſword of the "ſpirit, which is the word of GOD: praying "always with all prayer and ſupplication, "in the ſpirit, and watching thereunto with "all perſeverance."

In this deſcription, the girdle of truth ſtands in the foremoſt rank of the chriſtian's qualifications. What our Lord once ſaid to his followers may ſerve to render this vague expreſſion more determinate. "[i] If ye con-"tinue in my word, then are ye my diſci-"ples indeed; and ye ſhall know the truth, "and the truth ſhall make you free." To know the truth, implies to have an adequate

[h] Epheſ. c. 6. v. 14, 17. [i] Jo. c. 8. v. 31.

perception

perception of the doctrine of GOD; with a perſuaſion of its certainty in every article, and an impreſſion of the uſe and neceſſity of the diſpenſation. Such a poſſeſſion is the fruit of attentive conſideration of GOD's word, its tenor, and its tendency. From ſuch knowledge all chriſtian principle is derived; and as is the knowledge in degree of proficiency, ſuch in proportion will be the principles, in excellence and accompliſhment. The next qualification mentioned is "the breaſtplate of righteouſneſs;" which is converſant in all virtue, and emulates whatever is moſt truly becoming in every moral relation. Let it therefore be conſidered as a firm and manly reſolution to adhere to whatever in chriſtian morals is juſt, pure, lovely, and of good report. Thus, the character given by Horace [k] of the bravely juſt man, and ſteady to his purpoſe, will not unaptly expreſs this part of the characteriſtic of the chriſtian; by exhibiting a man whom no ſeduction can bend, no terror can ſhake from his faithful and virtuous reſolution. The next qualification is "the preparation "of the goſpel of peace." There is an obſcurity in this phraſe from the uſe of the

[k] Lib. III. Ode, 3.

word preparation in a form not common. In the language of Chemiſtry, a preparation of any thing implies its accommodation by a proceſs to a particular purpoſe: but even this ſenſe, though it comes near, does not amount to the meaning of the Ετοιμασία ευαγγελίου. Let the exhortation be placed by itſelf, and it will run thus: "be ſhod with "the preparation of the goſpel of peace:" And the goſpel will be found repreſented as the furniture, the apparatus of the chriſtian, wherewith[1] as with greaves of braſs he is guarded from annoyance; an accommodation that reſults from that peace and ſerenity, that perſuaſion of principle, and confidence, which flow from a well inſtructed profeſſion of the goſpel. The next qualification is the "ſhield of faith." On this occaſion let faith be underſtood generally as a deference to the word of God: which word, if applied as it was by our Saviour againſt the aſſaults or temptations of the enemy, ſerves as a ſhield for defence, and a ſword for the vindication of the chriſtian cauſe. Let faith then be conſidered as an implicit paſſive obedience to the word of God, and it becomes a principle by which the point of every weapon

[1] Whitby.

that

that is aimed againſt the chriſtian is received, while he remains ſecure under its ſhelter. The next qualification is "the helmet of ſalvation:" the hope of ſalvation, as St Paul[m] expreſſes the ſame ſentiment in another place. While the chriſtian's treaſure[n], his hopes and ruling paſſion concentre in the rewards of the goſpel, every deſire, that points to an object ſhort of them, will fail to captivate and enſnare him. The laſt weapon of his warfare mentioned is "the ſword of the ſpirit, which is the word of GOD." By this he is qualified to become the aſſailant in his turn; for taught in this word the road to victory, and by what exertions to acquire it, he is enabled to preſs forward, and obtain an eternal triumph, the prize of his high calling in Chriſt Jeſus.

Such are the chriſtian's qualifications, conſtructed of accompliſhed profeſſional and practical qualities united. If rational religion could ſpeak her ſimple genuine language, ſhe would ſtrive by precept and exhortation to produce the ſame ends as our holy religion purſues: and even as to the means, ſhe would extoll accompliſhments analogous to theſe as excellent, and recom-

[m] 1 Theſ. c. 5. v. 8. [n] Matt. c. 6. v. 21.

mend them as highly inſtrumental, in cultivating wiſdom, virtue, prudence, with diſcretion.

But in the courſe of time the ſtate and appearance of the profeſſion of chriſtianity have varied. In the age of the apoſtles, thoſe to whom the goſpel was propoſed, and out of whom the converſions were made, were arrived at years of diſcretion. When they embraced the chriſtian profeſſion, they were induced to it by their judgment or ſenſe of its truth, its importance, its advantages. They entered the church therefore with faith in Chriſt Jeſus. But, notwithſtanding, it is not to be imagined that the qualifications of the accompliſhed chriſtian ſprang up in them immediately in any great degree. The ſenſe with which they were impreſſed, the judgment they had formed, and by which they were influenced when they embraced the goſpel, were calculated to produce in them ſpeedily a ſhare of theſe qualifications; which, as they made a chriſtian proficiency, would riſe in proportion to ſtill higher and higher accompliſhment. In the lively impreſſion of the power of the word of Chriſt, which every true convert felt, when he entered into the church; in the mortified ſpirit which went before, predi-

disposing him to seek for resource, and pointing out to him the necessity of applying to Christ for redemption, and an effectual and satisfactory religion; he found (to use a former phrase) a great preparation of mind to the cultivation and proficiency of faith. But even at that time there were not a few instances of persons, who having entered the lists in the christian race, afterwards swerved to contention and vain jangling, to the neglect of[o] godly edifying, which is in faith. And other sad examples there were, of persons, who denied the faith into which they had been baptized; and became apostates, to their final reprobation and perdition. Of these last, some[p] there were, whatever their pretences might be, who really never were possessed of a true mortification, or were qualified to make a sincere profession, the previous requisites to christian regeneration. And moreover, St Paul[q] is not speaking of a case that never occurred, where he states it as impossible to renew again unto repentance a person, who hath been once enlightened, and hath tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partaker of the Holy Ghost, and hath tasted the good word of God, and the powers

[o] 1 Tim. c. 1. v. 4.
[p] Acts, c. 8. v. 18.
[q] Heb. c. 6. v. 4.

of

of the world to come: if ſuch a one ſhould fall away.

However, certain it is: that in the lively ſenſe of the uſe and efficacy of the word of Chriſt, which then preceded baptiſm, the converts of thoſe times had advantages; which thoſe have not, who are baptized in infancy, and in conſequence of an act of faith, not their own, but of their chriſtian parents. Wherefore, if it were true of them as Chriſt declared [r] it would be, that of the many called in thoſe times few only were admitted: and alſo that of thoſe who expreſſed ſome wiſhes to enter at the ſtrait gate, a ſmall number found the narrow path that leadeth unto life; while the majority ſeduced and perverted by ſome or other of the manifold temptations to which they all were liable, failed of producing the requiſite qualifications: much more reaſon is there to fear; that of the number now admitted without any choice of their own, ſtill fewer arrive at the degree of profeſſional and practical faith required of them. For the infants, brought to baptiſm by the faith and zeal of their parents, and received into the church through a charity, well warranted, are not

[r] Matt. c. 7. v. 13.

certainly

certainly capable, at that time, of the previous diſpoſitions of mind requiſite to our high calling. And it is ſtill with them a very poſſible caſe, that though they continue all their life time nominal profeſſors, they may never be properly qualified, even by the faith of aſſent, for initiation into the chriſtian covenant. If indeed to inform them of certain truths were all that was neceſſary ſo to qualify them, catechiſms, or any digeſts that laid down the important doctrines plainly and explicitly, would fully anſwer the purpoſe of conveying ſuch information. But as the goſpel is not only to be aſſented to as truth, but embraced as an object of deſire, ſomething more is neceſſary than barely to inform the judgment. Mr Locke ſpeaks very fully indeed to the ſame purpoſe, where he ſays of moral virtue. "[s] Let a man be never ſo "well perſuaded of the advantages of it; "that it is neceſſary to a man, who has any "great aims in this world, or hopes in the "next, as food to life: yet till he hungers "and thirſts after righteouſneſs, till he feels "an uneaſineſs in the want of it, his will "will not be determined to any action in "purſuit of this confeſſed greater good;

[s] Eſſay, Vol. I. p. 206.

but

" but any other uneaſineſs he feels in him-
" ſelf ſhall take place, and carry his will
" to other actions." If this be true of virtue or moral truth, of which man in the midſt of all his depravity had an inherent admiration naturally and indelibly impreſſed; how much more of a diſpenſation, how gracious, how deſirable ſoever it really be, to which man is not conducted by any inſtinct? Will books, will exhortation, will inſtruction infallibly pour perſuaſion, impreſs conviction on the mind? Will they alſo give an inclination ſeriouſly to ponder, and conſider the importance, the advantages of this religion? Will they give a tractable temper to obey and conform to the precepts of it? If not, they cannot be ſufficient in themſelves to excite that uneaſineſs of deſire, by which alone the goſpel can be rendered an object of purſuit, of cultivation. At ſuch diſtance is the baptized infant behind the perſuaded convert of the apoſtolic churches. His inſtitution ſhould of courſe be different. It ſhould be his firſt important care to acquire a juſt moral ſenſe, that he may ſee the neceſſity of religion to that rational ſerenity of mind which conſtitutes man's trueſt happineſs. After this let him ſtudy to know himſelf, let him enter into the ſevereſt ſcrutiny of

of his habitual, his conſtitutional weakneſſes and defects, let him probe his deepeſt wounds and drain the bittereſt dregs of the ſuggeſtions of conſcience; fearleſs of the pangs of ſorrow and remorſe. For the doctrine of the goſpel will afford him ſpeedy conſolation: and with reſource at hand ſo availing as this, his [t] ſorrow will have an event ſo different from the ſorrow of the world or of mere natural conſcience; that while theſe, hopeleſs of remedy, end in death or deſperation, the ſorrow of the chriſtian worketh peace. Nor is the proceſs long, by which ſo deſirable a cure will be effected: for let the mind but be free from the prejudice of conceit, let the eye but be open to the truth, and the evidences of chriſtianity will not fail to command the higheſt aſſent. Thus the convert, like the infirm woman [u], ſatisfied by repeated teſtimony that Chriſt is the power of GOD unto ſalvation, will make the experiment in faith, and aſſurance of ſucceſs. And the event of ſuch experiment will juſtify that confidence, of which it is alſo the reward; for in the oblation of the Son of GOD, he will perceive a perfect ſacrifice, expiation and ſatisfaction for all his offences.

[t] 2 Cor. c. 7. v. 10. [u] Mark. c. 5. v. 28.

When

When thus prepared he becomes effectually a believer, and by baptism also truly regenerate. But in leading the life of faith, the christian does not find himself discharged from duty. There is nothing accomplished in arts and sciences, nothing excellent in virtuous habit, to be attained without pains and application. In like manner the accomplished qualities, which distinguish the man that is truly led by the spirit of GOD, are not so formed but by patience, watchfulness, diligence in the work of sanctification. Beginning therefore at that lively impression which denominated baptismal faith, and made the profession an act of judgment, the convert proceeds to consider distinctly that word which contains the doctrines to which he has subscribed. From such application, if made with due deference, arise a knowledge and perception of the various and important truth contained in the word of GOD. From such a faith, thus associated with knowledge, flow as from a perennial spring, the qualifications of the christian. From hence that steadiness of principle, when the mind, persuaded of the wisdom, the prudence of its selections, is neither to be beguiled nor forcibly turned from its virtuous purpose. From thence the preparation

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of the chriſtian to purſue the rugged and thorny path of virtue, in a hoſtile country; preparation by the peace, and ſerenity not to be embroiled, that inſeparably attend the ſteps of chriſtian virtue. From this perſuaſion of the truth and efficacy of the word of GOD, proceeds that implicit deference to its dictates, the ſhield of faith. From thence the aſſured hope of ſalvation; and from thence, in ſhort, every weapon of the chriſtian warfare, by which the believer is enabled to become a conqueror in the hour of trial, and to wreſtle with ſucceſs, againſt the utmoſt powers of the ſpiritual adverſary of his ſalvation. But though theſe qualifications be, all of them, the fair progeny of that firſt lively faith, they are not produced all at once; nor have they, at their firſt appearance, either the firm texture, or the excellence which they afterwards acquire in the courſe of gradual improvement. For (it is a truth never to be overlooked) the chriſtian's renunciation of the world is not completed on a ſudden: but in his noviciate, frequently ſeduced, and beguiled at intervals, he finds all the natural and ſpiritual aids of his religion neceſſary to reſtore him, when occaſionally eſtranged, to his ſpiritual mind; and renew his ſtrength from time to time.

It

It is late in life, 'ere the, prejudices of ſenſe and appetite be ſo far removed, as to ſuffer the good ſeed to ſpread and grow without interruption. When theſe thorns are effectually rooted out; or, if that be not to be expected while man lives under the veil of human frailty, when they are deprived of a great ſhare of their rank iuxuriancy: then the excellent qualities that denominate the chriſtian begin to diſplay an accompliſhed character; then reaſon, judgment, diſcretion, are ſet at liberty from the byaſs that hung upon them, and then may a man both think and act freely, when no longer neceſſitated and enſlaved.

If therefore the declaration of our Lord, that the man is wiſe, who heareth and practiſeth his ſayings, be underſtood to have reſpect to the principles upon which he acts; they are juſtly denominated a foundation immoveable as a rock. Such a man is in the only rational ſenſe a free-thinker, and wiſe moreover, if ſuch an attribute (in the philoſophical interpretation) do juſtly belong to man. For if to be at reſt from the perturbations of ſenſual appetite, if to poſſeſs the mind ſequeſtered from the turmoils of the world, the judgment ſimple, and untinged with the jaundice of evil prejudice, if theſe

be

be requiſite to freedom of thought, who is there ſo eminently qualified to exert it as the chriſtian, prepared, as he is, by his repentance? Nor is ſuch freedom ſeparated from the trueſt wiſdom; for if it be a juſt definition of wiſdom, the poſſeſſion of a perfect mind, ſeparate from error: then wiſdom moſt eminently belongs to the man, who poſſeſſes in an untainted mind, the principles that are derived from conſummate truth, let down from heaven as a ſure lamp, to guide mankind in the perception of truth [w]. Nor let the inquirer ſtart, deluded by the fallacious imagination of judging for himſelf, when informed that the trueſt wiſdom is to be ſought by following preſcription. The caſe is the ſame in all ſcience as in chriſtian philoſophy. A true taſte, and accompliſhed diſcernment are always formed in the ſame manner: the ſame ſtrict adherence to rule and precept being requiſite in both, to the cultivation of a refined and accurate judgment. Let this diſtinction however be remembered to the praiſe of chriſtian diſcipline. No philoſophy ever could juſtly boaſt ſuch an aſcendency as this, that the ſpiritual man, by the ſuperior principles of his di-

[w] Jo. c. 16. v. 13.

vine

vine philoſophy, is exalted to an eminence, that ſubjects all things to his judgment; while he himſelf, a ſuperior character, is placed out of the reach of all [x], that ſupreme diſcerner excepted, from whom his chaſte principles are derived.

But alas! neither the perfect free thinker, nor the abſolutely wiſe or ſpiritual man, are ever realized in living characters. We believe that ſuch a one exiſted in the perſon of our redeemer. And what was the conſequence? "[y] The light ſhined in darkneſs, "and the darkneſs comprehended it not." The divine character, ſo far from being held in deſerved admiration, was too refined for the groſs conceptions of the beholders. And what wonder? Even Socrates, whoſe diſtinguiſhing conception lay in diſclaiming wiſdom, a ſentiment expreſſed in that golden ſentence: "[z] GOD alone is wiſe," ſo far from being heard with candour and favourable attention, was perſecuted, derided, and at laſt, to the eternal diſgrace of Athens, ſacrificed to the ſpleen of the ſophiſts, and the witlings of his age. The ſame cauſes operated in the ſame manner, upon the perſons, whoſe ſtation made them the judges

[x] 1 Cor. c. 2. v. 15. [y] Jo. c. 1. v. 5. [z] Plato Apol.

of

of Christ's commission. "[a] For these infa-
"tuated men, ignorant of GOD's righteous-
"ness and going about to establish their own
"righteousness, were so far from submitting
"themselves to the righteousness that is of
"GOD," that they set at nought and crucified the author of the common salvation. And the same causes will produce the same effects to the end of time.

But it may be said: if the sincerity and freedom of thought be not to be attributed to man, if wisdom be taken from him, what real accomplishment is there left him to pursue? Prudence remains, or christian soberness; effectual, if exercised according to the precepts of our holy religion, to the purposes of acquiring[b] present tranquillity, and the never failing consolation of assured hope. Here then is a character, at the same time truly christian, and prudent in a philosophical idea, according to the justest estimate of human conduct. But who can describe the various qualities, attentions, sentiments, that constitute christian soberness? Words will ever fail in such attempts. For if the heart have no disposition towards them, no presentiment of them; it will not be touched

[a] Rom. c. 10. v. 3. [b] Serm. I.

by the deſcription, which will appear through a falſe medium: but if the heart be already poſſeſſed by them, words will fall far ſhort of expreſſing the excellencies of them as they are felt. The chriſtian lives in the profeſſion of a religion ſent down from heaven, which to perceive accurately and diſtinctly, and to draw to himſelf all the advantages of the diſpenſation, in the fulleſt degree he can, employ his moſt earneſt care. He ſtudies therefore to know where to ſeek, and how to apply all the ſpiritual aids promiſed, and all the reſources of his religion, that he may be prepared againſt thoſe occaſions wherein the deceitfulneſs of falſe and erroneous appearances may embarraſs and intangle him. He carefully forms his judgment and his manners by its precepts, and by conforming himſelf to them, ſtrives to correct, amend and improve daily his conſtitution of mind, his temper, his habits of thinking and acting: that ſo, he may be furniſhed in all circumſtances, to every chriſtian ſentiment, and work emulous of his profeſſion. He labours to acquaint himſelf with every peculiar doctrine, that can prove to him a motive, an encouragement or conſolation in the practice of his ſeveral offices. In ſhort, he is diligent to form a mind and character truly and entirely

tirely chriſtian. On either hand of the articles of his profeſſion he finds many points of dogma introduced, ſtrange, intricate, but unimportant: for theſe he has but little leiſure and leſs inclination; while ſecured by his knowledge of the truth, he is already in poſſeſſion of the aſſurance of faith, the peace and firm perſuaſion of principle. From theſe queſtions however he experiences but ſmall embarraſſment, in compariſon of that which ariſes daily in his intercourſe with the world. He is endued with a conſtitution, the appetites of which, he lives in a world the prevalent and ruling objects of which, all conſpire to diſtract his mind, to blind his judgment, ſo that he may not ſee at all times, attend to, and purſue his true intereſt. Theſe deluſions, at all times ſuch, change their face and form of attack through every period of life; a circumſtance which increaſes his difficulties, of acting a rational chriſtian part, and renders the conflict perpetual, by which in all his judgments he ſtrives to ſeparate himſelf from theſe ſources of perverſe choice, and to conform himſelf to that word which he profeſſes to follow. From the patient and perſevering exerciſe of ſuch prudence, ariſe advantages equal to the utmoſt expectations that man can form of a religion or rational

ſcheme of happineſs. But were this obſervation founded only in theory, it might be liable to the common objection; that even in the moſt plauſible ſyſtems, through the omiſſion probably of ſome ſmall, but neceſſary part of the qualification, the event has frequently failed, in ſome degree, to confirm the hopes and expectations of the theoriſt. But experience has confirmed this truth, and the hiſtory of the chriſtian church gives ample teſtimony to it. From this well cultivated ſoberneſs, have ariſen an aſſurance and ſteadineſs of principle not to be ſhaken or deterred. From thence a peace of mind that paſſeth all underſtanding. From thence conſolation in diſtreſs: conſolation do I ſay? Exultation rather, even in that hour of extremeſt natural miſery, when the period of this preſent exiſtence viſibly approaches.

THE END.

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